PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1988-89

COMPRISING PERIOD
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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 151**

TENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1988-89

House of Commons

Monday 17 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Widows

2. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he is doing to help those 20,000 widows caught in an entitlement trap on the basis of the age bands operating before April 1988.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): We intend to restore entitlement to widowed mothers' allowance and widows' pension to all women widowed before 11 April 1988.

Miss Widdecombe: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that proposed action, which will negate the trap. How is he identifying the widows concerned and how soon will the exercise be completed?

Mr. Scott: We estimate that about 20,000 widows are affected. We have checked our records and we have contacted all those who [illegible] have identified. We believe that we have done so accurately but if anyone feels that she might be entitled and has not been contacted by the Department, she should get in touch with us.

Mr. Fearn: Has the Minister any proposals for increasing war widows' pensions?

Mr. Scott: Apart from anything else, I do not think that that supplementary question arises from the main question.

National Insurance

3. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the effect of the proposed changes in national insurance contributions on the low paid.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Moore): The proposals have been widely welcomed. I have received only one representation about the effect on the low paid.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the proposed changes are one of the most effective ways of giving help to those earning relatively low wages? Is he aware that 4 million people earning up to £115 a week will benefit by as much as £1·51 per week?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is precisely right about the number of beneficiaries and the amount by which they will benefit. About 15 million people earning more than £115 per week will also gain considerably. They will benefit by £3 per week.

We are seeing the completion of the initial changes in the national insurance contribution rates that we introduced in 1985. The combination is an effective way of trying to help and to remove the two awkward steps that are part and parcel of the first stage of the reform.

Mr. Frank Field: I welcome the changes, but I ask the Government to go a stage further. Are the Government aware that Britain has 40 per cent. of all part-time workers in Europe? That is because the national insurance system rigs the labour market in favour of part-time work. Will the Government consider imposing national insurance contributions on employers from the first pound?

Mr. Moore: We always consider carefully what the hon. Gentleman suggests, and we shall keep this area of the Departments responsibilities under constant examination. I should stress, however, that I do not share the essential

analysis which lies at the back of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question. The growth of part-time work in most western societies, and certainly in Britain, is a feature of the changing pattern of work. It is welcomed by employers and employees alike and is important in terms of work incentives and disincentives.

Transitional Benefit

4. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have lost transitional benefit during April of the current year.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lloyd): Some 610,000 income support recipients have been lifted out of transitional protection as a result of last week's uprating.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that that reply is somewhat disingenuous? Would it not have been better to spell out the fact that last year 2·2 million recipients did not receive the full uprating in line with inflation and that about 1 million lost money? This year, about 500,000 will not receive any uprating and 3·5 million will receive less than the amount necessary to keep up with the inflation figure that the Government have picked. How would the Minister explain to one of my constituents—Mrs. Bridget Williams of 123 Wordsworth road, Haughton Green, Denton—that her uprating this year will be 24p? Does he agree that it is entirely unacceptable in what is basically an oil-rich country for pensioners such as Mrs. Williams to lose in that way?

Mr. Lloyd: I answered the hon. Gentleman's question precisely as he asked it. It is right that some recipients will not gain from this year's uprating, and I have given the number of recipients who will find themselves in that position. The number on transitional protection remains at about 14 per cent. of all those entitled to income support. The hon. Gentleman refers to a particular case, but I believe that it would be wrong to discuss that case across the Floor of the House. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to contact me about a particular matter, I will reply to him. The overall position of those on transitional support is that while they are on that support they receive more than those in similar circumstances coming newly on to benefit.

Mr. Baldry: Will my hon. Friend make it clear that the entitlement to income support of the overwhelming majority of claimants will be greater than it was under the supplementary benefit system—those who atcually receive an increase—and that for the 14 per cent. who are not in that category and who are entitled to transitional payments £200 million has been spent on transitional payments in the first year alone?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is correct. At the point of change two thirds of those on income support received either the same amount or more. That explains why 32 per cent. of claimants received transitional payments.

Mr. John Evans: The Minister must be aware that the withdrawal of transitional payments has created widespread hardship in many parts of the country, but is he aware that a 66-year-old widow in my constituency has just received an increase of 35p per week, giving her a weekly income of £45·75? Does the Minister agree that that is a poverty wage?

Mr. Lloyd: There were massive changes under the new rules which came in last April. As I said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), those changes brought real gains to many people. The changes also produced far greater simplicity in the system and greater fairness as between claimants in similar circumstances. It is not possible to make such massive changes without there being some sad and hard cases during the period of erosion of the transitional payments. I accept that, but I repeat that in all cases where the transitional payment is being made or being eroded, the individual concerned has been receiving payments greater than those to which people in similar circumstances are entitled when coming newly on to benefit.

Mr. Robin Cook: Did the Under-Secretary of State listen to the BBC feature last week on the loss of transitional protection by disabled people, for which the BBC could not find a Minister willing to take part? Did he hear of the case of Mrs. Hodgson of Northumberland, who cannot even turn over in bed unaided? Is he aware that when her teenage son became 18 he had to leave home so that she would not lose her severe disablement premium but that, as a result, she lost £7 per week in transitional protection? Is the Minister prepared to defend rules which penalise disabled families when they stay together and also when they break up, and if he cannot defend those rules, how does he intend to change them?

Mr. Lloyd: I am prepared to defend rules which bring in a special disability premium and make it absolutely certain that the premium reaches everyone in that category. I repeat that I cannot comment across the Floor of the House on particular cases for which I do not have the full details. I did not hear the programme, but it was not a question of a Minister being unwilling to take part —the programme makers did not accept our suggestion that a Minister should make a recording for the programme because the time suggested by the BBC was not possible for us due to other departmental commitments.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: When the Minister claims that many people are better off as a result of the upratings, has he taken into account the real situation facing many people, especially disabled people and single parents? Will he give an analysis of the 610,000 and tell us how many are better off in real terms? Will he also give details of any regional variations as the loss of transitional benefits at the time of uprating has severely hit many people in Scotland, who now also have to face the reality of the community charge which came into effect on 1 April?

Mr. Lloyd: All those who had an uprating are better off as a result of it. The question that has been at issue is the difference between the old system of supplementary benefit and that of income support. The figures on transitional protection show clearly that two thirds have gained or are in exactly the same position as previously. As to community charge rebates, that aspect is generously organised and rebates are available to at least 1 million people in Scotland if they will apply for them. Those receiving housing benefit will automatically have rebates incorporated in their community charge bills.

Widowers' Pension

5. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will arrange that all public sector staff pension schemes incorporate provision for widowers as a matter of course.

Mr. Scott: From 6 April this year, all occupational pension schemes used for contracting out of SERPS must provide benefits for widowers. Many public sector schemes have provided widowers' pensions for a number of years, and others are currently amending their rules to introduce them.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that now that membership of all pension schemes is voluntary it behoves public sector schemes to keep at the forefront of current thinking on pensions? Does he also agree that in introducing funding for widowers' pensions these can be no question of retrospective funding at the taxpayers' expense where the unions did not bother to argue for it in the first place as in the case of teachers?

Mr. Scott: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's comment that the question of who pays for any retrospection would arise. Many schemes introducing widowers' benefits provide a way for contributors to purchase backdated entitlement. That is a sensible provision. It is right that the Government should set an example by providing for widowers' benefits in the public sector.

Family Credit

6. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is being done to make it easier to claim family credit.

Mr. Moore: Last December we amended the regulations to make it easier for claimants who are self-employed to use their accounts as evidence of their income. This month we are bringing into use a simpler and shorter version of the family credit claim form.

Mr. Stevens: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. I recall that when we reviewed the social security system in 1986 the extension of family credit was an important part of the process. I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that the extended help that he mentions will be greatly welcomed throughout the country. I am pleased to hear that the system has been made easier. As part of the publicity campaign, will my right hon. Friend tell the public of the significant number of claimants receiving more than £20 per week in family credit and perhaps comment on the recent uprating at the same time?

Mr. Moore: Approximately 60 per cent. of recipients receive £20 per week or more. My hon. Friend is right to say that that has been widely welcomed. The average payment per week under family credit is £25 per week compared with £15 under the old family income supplement. I have made it clear to the House in previous answers that we are now spending £422 million on family credit compared with £180 million on FIS.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Government spend billions of pounds advertising the sale of state-owned industries and public bodies? Why does he not find money to advertise family credit properly so that the public will understand their entitlement to benefits and claim for them? The Secretary of State is always moaning and groaning about the lack of take-up.

Mr. Moore: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is also a very old friend of mine, for having arranged so carefully to allow me to express my congratulations to the media on the way in which they handled the family credit launch campaign last week. The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to learn that £7 million is being spent, quite rightly, on an excellent campaign to encourage low-income families to claim those benefits for which they are eligible under family credit. I am delighted to have the hon. Gentleman's warm congratulations in anticipation of that.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Will my right hon. Friend explain how the family credit uprating increases benefits more effectively for target families and children in need than would a simple increase in child benefit across the income board.

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the fact that, with the new structure of family credit combined with the system of income support, we have been able in last week's uprating to add substantially to the support that we give to families with children. Had there been a straight across-the-board increase in child benefit, more that 1·1 million families—counting those on family credit, 1·4 million, with more than 3 million children—would not have benefited as they have.

Young People

8. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he is doing to help youngsters who for good reason cannot live at home.

Mr. Scott: I recently announced a package of measures which will be of real help to those relatively few 16 and 17-year-olds who have no choice but to live independently.

Mr. Hind: I am grateful for that answer, especially because, having promised to monitor the effects of income support, the Department is now matching words with concrete proposals. Will my hon. Friend explain how 16 and 17-year-olds will benefit from the proposed changes?

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for recognising that we are fulfilling our pledge to monitor the impact of the new reforms and, where necessary, to make changes. In effect, 16 and 17-year-olds who have to live away from home will enjoy the enhanced benefit equivalent to that paid to 18 to 25-year-olds.

Mr. Graham Allen: Will the Minister do anything to help families in my city, with 18-year-old children who next year will have to pay a sum approaching £300 in poll tax that will break up a number of families?

Mr. Scott: The main question relates directly to 16 and 17-year-olds, not to 18-year-olds, so the hon. Gentleman's question does not arise.

Mr. Stanbrook: In the light of the campaign by the Children's Society, what is my hon. Friend doing to protect organisations which attempt in good faith to assist children forced to live on their own?

Mr. Scott: Not only have we changed the rate of benefit for 16 and 17-year-olds who have to live alone, but we have announced changes in the support that the Government give to hostels, with a long transitional protection period both for individuals in hostels and for hostels themselves.

Mr. Flynn: May we, with our customary magnanimity, welcome the improvements that have taken place? Now that the Government have acknowledged the existence of a labour market which does not differentiate between adults when deciding what is necessary to cover their housing costs, will the Minister go the whole way and pay the full adult rate to these people? Is the Minister not concerned that we may be going down the same road as America where a decade of neglect of social security has created an army of 3 million homeless tent people? When will the Government's actions match the growing and very worrying crisis for young people without homes, money or hope?

Mr. Scott: I am grateful for the restricted welcome that the hon. Gentleman has given to our proposals. I have to say, however, that I am certain that the broad thrust of our policy on 16 and 17-year-olds is right. It is wrong to give people of that age a perverse incentive to leave home. *[Interruption.]* I represent a constituency where in years gone by—and, indeed, all too often nowadays—young people believing that they could come to the city and chance their luck have been drawn into all kinds of temptation. I do not want to offer that kind of incentive. I believe that we are right to try to identify those who are estranged from their parents and have no option but to leave home and live independently, and to give them extra help.

Housing Benefit

10. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had recently with local authorities on housing benefit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Department has regular meetings with the local authority associations throughout the year to discuss housing benefit, and we consult them formally on proposals for regulations.

Mr. Jones: The Department of the Environment is forcing councils in my area to put up rents. When will housing benefit be raised in line with those increases?

Mr. Lloyd: All those who pay rents at or below the market level will receive the full housing benefit appropriate to them. There is no problem about that. More people on lower incomes will have a wider choice of accommodation than they had before.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is important that local authorities and local DSS offices should work closely together and co-ordinate their efforts to reduce delay and uncertainty for individual claimants?

Mr. Lloyd: Housing benefit is paid by the local authority, not by the local DSS, but I agree that there should always be close co-operation between local authorities and DSS offices.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Will the Minister take steps to consult one of my local authorities—the borough of Trafford—about my constituent, Mr. Riley? When Mr. Riley's wife died, the joint pension that he and his wife had received was cut to a single pension. As his housing benefit was also cut, he ended up paying more rent out of a smaller income.

Mr. Lloyd: Again, I do not wish to talk about particular cases, but the personal allowance will be adjusted to meet the person's new and sad circumstances as a single person, which will have an effect on his entitlement to housing benefit. The rule is that people in similar situations should be treated similarly. A married person who, alas, becomes a single person through bereavement will find that the regulations which apply to him are the same as those which apply to unmarried people.

Mrs. Gorman: Does my hon. Friend agree with me that the root cause of the problem—and of the previous question about young people who cannot find housng on their own—is the fact that antiquated Rent Acts prevent many people from letting a room, a flat or part of their house because, rightly or wrongly, they fear that if they cannot get on with the tenants it will be impossible to get them out? Is my hon. Friend aware that Sweden faced exactly the same problems and has done away entirely with the legislation governing rent which has resulted in a flood of property on to the market and a surplus of accommodation?

Mr. Lloyd: I cannot follow my hon. Friend down that track because those are matters for the Department of the Envirionment, but to repeat what I said in reply to an earlier question: where market rents are charged in order to draw more property on to the market, full housing benefit will be available.

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister must be aware that his earlier answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) was a little misleading. He must be aware that in the future, and even in some cases now, it is likely that the ceiling at which housing benefit is paid will not be the same as the rent demanded. If part of the mechanism for deciding the ceiling is to penalise elderly people who keep a spare room for their relatives, is the Minister aware that that will cause not just hardship but outrage?

Mr. Lloyd: When a person claims housing benefit, the rent officer will take into account the market rent for property of a size suitable for that individual, but the changes will result in a far wider choice of housing than there is now. For suitable property, housing benefit will be paid up to market levels.

Income Support

12. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding those pensioners on income support who receive no benefit uprating in April.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Various representations have been received on this subject.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister not recognise that when he replies to cases taken up with him it is no good just saying in his letters that the claimant will find the answer "disappointing". For the second year running 1,700 of my constituents in Burnley and Pendle, who are paid by the Burnley DSS office, have received no benefit uprating, with

the result that they are at least 10 per cent. worse off than they were two years ago. They do not find the position disappointing—they find it appalling. Is it not time that the Government did something for those people?

Mr. Lloyd: As the hon. Gentleman's question refers to pensioners on income support, let me tell him one thing that the Government are doing. From next October, we are raising the rate for couples aged 75 and over by £3·50 a week and the rate for the disabled by the same amount.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The income support premium for pensioners is most welcome but it applies to people aged 75 and over and does not, therefore, help many women who retired at 60 without an occupational pension before the state earnings-related pension scheme was introduced in 1978. That applies to women now aged between 71 and 74, many of whose incomes have not risen by 23 per cent., more than the rate of inflation. What does my hon. Friend intend to do to help them?

Mr. Lloyd: The changes that have been announced in benefits for those who are older are not necessarily the last of the improvements that we shall make to the system. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has promised to consider carefully all aspects of the system and no doubt when change is demonstrably needed it will be effected in good time.

Mr. Kirkwood: If change is contemplated, will the Minister seriously consider helping those elderly people to whom the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) referred, who have lost out and have no cash increases because transitional protection has been withdrawn? Is the machinery available to ensure that, if pensioners in that category can show, in good faith, that they have not been able to take account of the change—which some of them did not anticipate and of which they were ignorant—the Department can deliver cash help to them immediately?

Mr. Lloyd: The point about transitional protection being eroded is that it ensures that at no point will there be an actual cash loss or a surprise reduction such as that to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Robin Cook: Was the Under-Secretary of State present last Tuesday when the Prime Minister said that she took credit for the fact that 98 per cent. of pensioners had received this year's uprating? Has he since had the courage to tell her that her figures were misleading? Will he take this opportunity to correct her and confirm that of those pensioners claiming income support, not 98 per cent., but fewer than 68 per cent., received the full uprating? Does the hon. Gentleman believe that it is to the credit of the Government that they have just cut the standard of living of a third of the poorest of all pensioners?

Mr. Lloyd: I was not present last week, but I understand my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to have said that 98 per cent. of pensioners would receive an increase—not necessarily the full increase, but an increase.

Mr. John Marshall: Would my hon. Friend care to remind the House what has happened to the standard of living of pensioners over the past 10 years and how that period compares with the previous five years?

Mr. Lloyd: The figures have often been raised at Question Time and my hon. Friend is right to draw the attention of the House to them once more. The total income of pensioners has risen by 23 per cent. since 1979. That includes SERPS, interest from savings, changes in benefits and the uprating of pensions. All those go to make up an increase of 23 per cent. in total income.

Disability Benefits

13. **Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department has drawn up proposals for the review of disability benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The right hon. Gentleman may have heard my exchange with the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) in our debate last week. We have made it clear that we welcome comments and discussion on each of the reports of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys disability surveys, when they are published and in the subsequent period. When we have all the reports, which will be in July, we hope to announce a timetable for further action.

Mr. Morris: In advance of that review, is it not both shocking and utterly wrong that tens of thousands of severely disabled people should have had not an extra penny from this month's uprating to protect them against an inflation rate that is nudging 8 per cent? Is the Minister aware that, for them, so-called transitional protection is fancy ministerial language for cutting their benefits last year and freezing them this year? Why should any severely disabled person have to sit up and beg for charity to protect already low living standards?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has made it clear, in his answers to a number of questions, that the essence of transitional protection is that it is eroded over time. Otherwise, we should extend indefinitely the inequalities between claimants in similar circumstances. We should look at the question against the background of a 90 per cent. increase in real terms in expenditure on the disabled and the long-term sick under this Government. Our record compares favourably with that of the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member.

Mr. Hannam: In looking at the basic financial costs faced by disabled people, will my hon. Friend ignore the ridiculously low figure of some £6 a week in the OPCS report which was based on far too wide an average of disabled people? Will he consider the costs of £40 or £50 a week to disabled people in trying to live normal lives? That estimate was worked out by the disability organisations including the Disablement Income Group and the Disability Alliance?

Mr. Scott: Of course I shall not ignore anything in the OPCS reports as the Government commissioned them and they provide a tremendous source of information on a scale that never existed before. But I recognise my hon. Friend's point. I shall be meeting a deputation, including DIG, in the not-too-distant future, and no doubt that will be one of the matters to be discussed.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that one of the ways in which we can help the severely disabled is massively to increase the amount of money paid in constant attendance allowance, which is currently at just over £34, to those who

look after disabled people? When compared with the amount of money that the state pays to private registered nursing homes which cost way over £200 a week for one individual, does it not make sense to give more money to those being paid constant attendance allowance so that more people can look after their friends, relatives and others?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point as we consider the balance between the need for institutional care and care in the community. He will know that Sir Roy Griffiths produced an important report on the subject and the Government are considering their response to it. One of the most important matters that will have to be considered in the light of that report is the balance between domicillary care and care in institutions.

Family Credit

14. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how far up the income scale family credit goes.

Mr. Moore: Family credit is not just for those on very low wages, and thousands of people have not yet realised the high levels of income that they can have and still get family credit. The level depends on the number of children in the family and their ages. For example, a family with three children aged three, eight and 11 could be taking home up to £141 a week and still be eligible for family credit, and if the children were all teenagers the amount could be over £170 a week; both those amounts are net pay after tax and national insurance deductions.

One of the main objectives of the major advertising campaign which has just begun is to ensure that people are more aware of the high levels of income at which family credit is payable and how it applies to their families.

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend's answer highlights the fact that many people do not realise that they qualify for family credit. What is the current take-up in terms of expenditure, and, given my right hon. Friend's answer about the advertising campaign, can he reassure me that if there is a much greater take-up in the future, the speed with which settlements will be made will be at least as good as now, if not better?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend confirms the point identified in the research—people's failure to understand that they are eligible—which we are trying to address in the advertising campaign. In answer to his specific questions, the expenditure take-up is running at 65 per cent. at the moment. In regard to the clearance times, when we introduced family credit, we set up a target of 18 working days. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend and the House that in March the department averaged 17·1 days in clearance time of which only five days involved departmental work and the rest was incurred when we had to receive information from employers.

Mr. Frank Field: Now that the Government have launched the advertising campaign, which I welcome, will the Secretary of State tell the House what level of take-up of benefit the Government will consider satisfactory?

Mr. Moore: I shall continue to pursue as hard, as fast and as carefully as I can all those who are eligible. After one year we have reached 65 per cent. of the approximate expenditure, a very sizeable achievement, as the hon. Gentleman knows. While I thank him for his generosity in welcoming our campaign, I prefer to aim for a sizeable increase in take-up and I am not prepared to put a precise figure on the advertising campaign at present. I know that the hon. Gentleman will delight in joining me in welcoming the more than doubling in expenditure on families on low incomes in comparison with FIS.

Mr. David Nicholson: As my right hon. Friend has made clear, family credit is an excellent benefit in that it is well targeted. However, is he aware of the strong pressure on both sides of the House for its take-up to be increased? Could an improvement be made by simplifying the application form?

Mr. Moore: We have just been through a process of simplifying the form. The new form is shorter and is not difficult to fill out. The research that has been done—it has been placed in the Library at the request of the Opposition—shows that the length of the form was never seen as a key problem in take-up. I think that my hon. Friend will agree, when he looks at the new form which was published last week, that it is a considerable improvement on the earlier one.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Retirement Housing

53. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what assistance the Church of England gives to its ministers in obtaining housing when they retire and are obliged to vacate their tied accommodation.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing Church Commissioners): The retirement housing scheme administered by the pensions board and largely funded by the Church Commissioners enables all retired clergy, assistant staff and their widows to obtain suitable retirement housing. This can either be by way of an equity sharing mortgage or by renting a property, both on advantageous terms. Full details of the scheme are set out in the pamphlet issued by the pensions board entitled "Retirement Housing", a copy of which I am arranging to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his reassuring answer. Can he clarify and confirm that spouses of retired clergy can enjoy henceforth security of accommodation for the remainder of their lifetimes?

Mr. Alison: Yes, I can confirm that. The widows of deceased clergymen who are in houses provided by the pensions board can stay in them and may be eligible for extra financial help. There are some 4,200 clergy widows receiving general assistance from the Church Commissioners at present.

Mr. Frank Field: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Church's record towards retired clergy is rather good but what is poor is the amount that we pay clergy when they are working? What plans does he have to improve that?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman will know that although the average clergy stipend of roughly £9,100 a year is on the low side, it has been increasing dramatically

in recent years. Also, the factor of help in kind which could be worth an extra £4,000 or £5,000 a year in respect of housing help and so on is not an inconsiderable sum.

Drugs

54. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what activities the Church Commissioners plan to counter the growing threat of drug increase.

Mr. Alison: This is not directly a matter for the Church Commissioners whose principal responsibilities relate to the financial support of serving and retired clergy. However, the General Synod's board for social responsibility has published valuable information packs on drugs and alcohol. If my hon. Friend wishes, I shall arrange for the packs to be sent to him. Individual clergy at parish level have access to the information through their diocesan organisations.

Mr. Rathbone: I welcome that answer and I accept my right hon. Friend's offer to send me the information packs. However, is there no way in which the Church Commissioners can increase the training of clergy so that they can make a greater contribution to the prevention of drug misuse by closer liaison with parents, teachers and social services and through their Church activities?

Mr. Alison: There is no shortage of the necessary funding for such training. My hon. Friend's point is that there needs to be the greatest possible motivation by local parochial clergy. I shall take note of his point. It is up to the diocese to promote such special interests and the availability of useful information is one way in which the motivation can be stimulated.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In the light of the strong connection between the Children's Society and the Church of England, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is impressing on the Government the need to accept their amendments in the Lords.

Mr. Alison: That is a Parthian shaft that I must deflect over my shoulder because I have no direct responsibility for that.

Mr. Skinner: Is this what is known as the opium of the people?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is a renowned spokesman for the people. I am glad to say that the Church of England is the largest and most representative body of voluntary subscribers to an institution in this country. We would vie with the hon. Gentleman in claiming to be fully representative of the people.

Easter Communicants

55. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement about the trend in Easter communicants since 1980.

Mr. Alison: The number of Easter communicants each year is gathered from parish returns by the central board of finance of the Church of England, not by the Church Commissioners. The downward trend in Easter communicants from about 1·7 million in 1980 to about 1·5 million in 1986 contrasts with the upward trend in weekly communicants on a normal Sunday from 699,000 to 716,000 over the same period.

Mr. Marshall: Would not the trend be more favourable if certain leaders of the Church, such as the Bishop of Durham, did not use Easter as an occasion to declare spiritual UDI? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the leaders of the Church should confirm the faithful in our faith rather than sow the seeds of doubt?

Mr. Alison: I gladly remind my hon. Friend of the upward trend in weekly communicants. The main line to observe is that taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose clear and forceful exposition of the fundamental truths and doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ was a prominent feature of his sermon on Easter Sunday.

Mr. Cormack: Would it not be helpful if my right hon. Friend took aside the Bishop of Durham, told him that he is likely to go down in history as the Salman Rushdie of the Church of England, and advised him to stick to politics rather than religion?

Mr. Alison: I am not sure where I would draw the Bishop of Durham aside. If I bring him to the Palace of Westminster, there may be a local riot.

Mr. Latham: At the risk of seeming to support a theocratic state, does my right hon. Friend think that the number of Easter communicants in 1989 is seriously a matter for the House of Commons?

Mr. Alison: I think that it is. The existence of a leaven of believers in the most fundamental and relevant of all human truths affects and benefits a lump of secular and civilised society, although it may not have a direct connection with it.

Sales of Goods

56. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, how much money was raised from sales of goods in cathedrals and churches in each of the last three years; what account the commissioners take of these finances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners do not hold statistics of the amounts raised from the sale of goods in cathedrals and churches. In so far as income from this source forms part of cathedrals' overall income, the commissioners take account of it when they make grants on a selective basis towards the pay of cathedral staff.

Mr. Greenway: Is it not a fact that many shops, churches and cathedrals open for long hours but would like to be able to sell a wider range of goods than they are currently permitted by the Sunday trading laws? Will my right hon. Friend impress on shopkeepers that they should observe a national compromise like everyone else and not open for four hours on any Sunday?

Mr. Alison: The laws governing Sunday trading apply to cathedrals and churches in the same way as they do to other bodies. It is in the nature of the Church establishment that it should observe not only the letter but the spirit of the law. I take note of my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Thurnham: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Church Commissioners are increasing their investment in retail businesses? Will he ask them whether they intend to take advantage of the offer to purchase the House of Fraser—whose owner said, "Only God can take it from me."?

Mr. Alison: I shall seek divine guidance before I reply to that sensitive and rather puzzling question.

Mr. Kirkhope: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be wrong for some of our greater and finer churches and cathedrals to be turned too much into places of commercial activity? Many people are already, to some extent, put off going to them by this activity when they wish to worship privately.

Mr. Alison: I take my hon. Friend's point. However, I hope that he will bear in mind that there is a genuine and legitimate tourist interest—not least from overseas visitors—in the heritage of our churches and cathedrals. It is up to the day-to-day management of the churches, by responsible parochial church councils or cathedral staff, to ensure that the proper balance is struck between those who wish to sightsee and those who wish to worship.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Food (Health Implications)

57. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will post a notice in all cafeterias and restaurants open to hon. Members, giving advice on the health implications of various foods available.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): No, Sir. I am not convinced that such a notice would fulfil any meaningful purpose.

Mr. Janner: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that he ought to advise colleagues about whether the Government think it is reasonable, right and safe to eat, for example, eggs, mayonnaise, chicken meat or apples, or to drink water? As most of us are against by-elections—although we are prepared to make some exceptions—does the right hon. Gentleman not consider that, having failed to advise the country competently on what foods are safe, he at least ought to advise Members of Parliament?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept a single word of that. As my previous replies on this subject have shown, the Refreshment Department places great emphasis on making available food and menus of good quality, which provide a nutritious and balanced diet. However, there is a point where the Department's responsibilities end and the individual's good sense must prevail.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend accept that we are much heartened by his response? Will he continue to bear in mind that this is not a kindergarten, but a place for responsible adults who are quite capable of looking after their own health?

Mr. Wakeham: Certainly. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support.

Mr. Walley: Is not the reply that we have just received indicative of the fact that there is no health policy for eating in the Palace of Westminster? The Government allowed the Catering Sub-Committee to consider for 18 months how to introduce healthy food and then to come up with a decision to employ consultants who, we are told, are not suitable to do this work. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the person who was going to do the consultative work had a degree in hotel and catering management, was a state registered dietician and, what is more, co-ordinated the textbook on GCSE nutrition? Why cannot we have a proper, healthy eating policy in the palace of Westminster?

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Lady knows, the Catering Sub-Committee retains the services of a qualified nutritional and dietary expert. The Sub-Committee put forward a proposal and I understand the hon. Lady's disappointment. However, the Services Committee is entirely free to accept, change or reject any resolution from its Sub-Committee. There would be little point in it reconsidering such resolutions if it were not able to do so.

Table Office

58. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received about the new procedures for access to the Table Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have received only one such representation since Monday 6 February, the date on which the restrictions came into effect. The representation was in the form of a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies).

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that the crush in the Table Office is much eased after tea time? Will he consider allowing those research assistants who have Library passes to enter the Table Office after about half past four?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Wakeham: The rules on access to the Table Office were agreed by the House as part of its endorsement of the Services Committee's recommendation in its second report of the Session 1987-88. Any modification to those rules would first be a matter for the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee. As my hon. Friend may be aware, the rules which were agreed by the House prohibit Members' staff using the Table Office after 2 pm, Mondays to Thursdays. However, during those times, Members' staff may deposit questions and notices of motion in a box which has been installed outside the Table Office and which is regularly cleared.

Accommodation

Mr. Knox: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps to ensure that the standard of accommodation and fittings to be provided for Members and staff of the House in phases 1 and 2 of the Bridge street development will be at least equivalent to that which has been provided for Ministers and their civil servants in the recently completed Richmond terrace development.

Mr. Wakeham: I am fully aware of the need to ensure that the accommodation and fittings in the Bridge street development are provided to a standard sufficient to meet the needs of right hon. and hon. Members and others who will be using them. Immediate responsibility for the

achievement of these standards lies with the New Buildings sub-committee of the Services Committee, which I am sure is aware of the need to protect and promote the interests of the House.

Mr. Knox: Can my right hon. Friend guarantee that as much money will be spent on the accommodation of Members of Parliament as has been spent on Ministers' and civil servants' accommodation in Richmond house?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that my hon. Friend is thinking of the restored eighteenth century rooms fronting Richmond terrace. A decision was quite properly taken to restore and refurbish these rooms in a way that was appropriate to their age and artistic distinction. The other accommodation in Richmond house is equipped from standard Civil Service ranges, and , as I have said, the standard of furnishings and fittings for Members in phase 1 of the new buildings is already being looked at.

Terrace

60. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he has any plans to arrange for the establishment of permanently constructed reception and dining areas on the Terrace of the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: No, Sir. The Terrace pavilion is intended to operate from Easter until Christmas.

Mr. Greenway: Can my right hon. Friend tell us more about the facility that was unveiled last week? How much did it cost; how many will it accommodate and for what principal functions; and when does he expect it to be in general use?

Mr. Wakeham: I can tell my hon. Friend some of the information that he requires. The total cost is not expected to exceed £150,000; 75 per cent. of that will come from the Refreshment Department's trading fund account and the remainder from the parliamentary works account. It is planned as a viable project that will not only pay its own costs but is expected to contribute to the general running costs of the Refreshment Department. It will operate from Easter until Christmas each year.

Mr. John Evans: Was the green and white candy-striped edifice that has just been erected sanctioned by the Royal Fine Art Commission?

Mr. Wakeham: I think that it was to replace a temporary building that was put up before. That question did not arise.

Mr. McLoughlin: I welcome my right hon. Friend's answer, but does he accept that the first priority should be to provide a reception area at the Norman Porch, so that when constituents come down they do not have to stand in the rain to wait to see the place to which they should have access?

Mr. Wakeham: There is a question later on the Order Paper on that subject. Certain proposals are being discussed by the authorities in this House and in another place. We hope to make some progress shortly.

Closed Circuit Link

61. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make it his policy to make available to all Members who wish it, a closed circuit television link from the Chamber.

Mr. Wakeham: As Chairman of the Select Committee that is currently considering the televising of our proceedings, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on such matters before the recommendations of the Committee are known.

Mr. Allen: Is the Lord President aware that in the United States members of Congress have access to a souhd link and to closed-circuit television? Will he at least consider incorporating such a proposal for the consideration of the House in the forthcoming report?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for our report. I am sure that a number of hon. Members feel that colleagues already spend too little time in the Chamber and would strongly oppose any further move that would worsen that situation.

Mr. Latham: My right hon. Friend is right. Is not the best way to find out what is going on in the Chamber to come in here and listen?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend, but he will have to await publication of our report to see our views on that.

Visitors

62. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any further statement to make with regard to providing improved facilities for visitors to the Houses of Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: The Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee has submitted specific proposals to the Administration Committee of the other place, where it is generally recognised that there is a need to improve the arrangements for visitors at the Norman Porch. Those proposals are, I understand, receiving sympathetic consideration.

Mr. Skinner: Why does it take so long to resolve this problem? For donkey's years questions have been asked in the House about improving facilities for visitors coming to this place, yet when somebody decides to build a boudoir with Liberace-type candelabra on the Terrace for the top people, the necessary money can be found at the drop of a hat. If we cannot get the other matter resolved would it not be a good idea to allow visitors to occupy that place?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the problems in dealing with this are not just concerned with money, because there is also the question of security. Some steps have been taken but, unfortunately, discussions are still going on and at this stage I am not in a position to say anything further.

Mr. Jessel: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have been here for nearly 19 years? During that time I have had over 300 visitors and not one of them has ever complained about the facilities.

Mr. Wakeham: I am delighted to hear that.

Hillsborough Stadium Disaster

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the disaster at the Sheffield Wednesday football club ground at Hillsborough on Saturday. Everyone has been horrified by this incredible tragedy in which 94 lost their lives and 174 were injured.

Shortly after the start of the match, there was a surge of spectators on the Leppings lane terrace, which crushed many at the front against the perimeter fence. This accounted for most of the deaths and injuries.

The match was due to start at 3 pm. To help ensure orderly access, the gates of the ground were opened at 12 noon. At 2.30 pm most of the Nottingham fans were in the ground, but many of the Liverpool supporters were still arriving. It was clear to the police officers in charge that there was ample capacity still to be filled in some parts of the enclosure allocated to Liverpool.

At about 2.45 pm there was a large crowd of Liverpool supporters at the turnstiles in Leppings lane behind the west stand. There was difficulty in coping with the pressure on the turnstiles, and the police used loud hailers to urge the crowd to be patient. At about 2.50, more Liverpool supporters arrived and the numbers in front of the turnstiles increased. Some supporters started to climb the walls and turnstiles, and those at the front of the crowd outside the stadium were under considerable pressure from those behind.

The senior police officer present considered that there was a possible danger to the lives of the spectators at the front of the crowd outside the stadium. In order to relieve the pressure, he arranged for an exit gate near the turnstiles to be opened to let a section of the crowd through. The relationship of that action to the disaster on the terrace shortly afterwards is clearly a central question to be investigated.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I yesterday visited the football ground and the two Sheffield hospitals which received casualties. I should like to pay tribute to all those involved in the rescue operations at the ground, including the many spectators who gave their help, and to those others, including the hospital staffs and voluntary agencies, who have since been working so hard treating the injured and consoling the bereaved. We heard many accounts of courage exerted on behalf of others.

I have asked for further factual reports from the police and other services, the local authority and the Football Association. Inquests will be held in due course. But over and above this, there is clearly need for a full and independent inquiry to identify the causes of the disaster and to examine what needs to be done to prevent such an accident happening again. I have therefore asked Lord Justice Taylor to carry out an inquiry with the following terms of reference:

"To inquire into the events at Sheffield Wednesday football ground on 15 April 1989 and to make recommendations about the needs of crowd control and safety at sports grounds."

Mr. Brian Johnson, the chief constable of Lancashire, has agreed to assist the inquiry as an assessor, and arrangements will be made as necessary for other qualified assessors to be appointed and for the inquiry to be provided with technical advice and support. I am asking that the inquiry should proceed with all possible speed. Lord Justice Taylor will visit Sheffield tomorrow to begin his investigation. I am grateful to him for agreeing to undertake this task.

However, we need also to take a wider view. The Government believe that the future of football in this country lies in a national membership scheme in designated grounds—*[Interruption.]*—and now, it seems, also in providing all-seated accommodation at major football clubs. This would involve the disappearance of terraces at those grounds. It might also involve amendments to strengthen the Football Spectators Bill so that its provision for the licensing of grounds matched this concept. We shall be considering these matters urgently.

An appeal fund is being set up by the civic authorities of Liverpool, Nottingham and Sheffield. The Government will be contributing £500,000 immediately towards this fund.

This was a devastating tragedy. Our deep sympathy goes to the families of those who died, to those recovering, and—particularly moving yesterday—to those young people who are still fighting for life and health. We owe a duty, it seems to us, to these passionate supporters of football to examine urgently and thoroughly the causes and the background, and to do all in our power to prevent such a thing from happening again. We have to set our sights high and find a better way for British football.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I, first of all, offer the deepest sympathy of my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself to all those who were injured in or bereaved by this terrible tragedy. Little that we say will help them at this moment, but I hope that they find some comfort in the knowledge that the whole country shares their grief and suffering. We also offer our hopes for a full recovery to those 17 patients still in intensive care.

May I also express our gratitude to and our admiration for all those individuals who did such remarkable work saving lives, comforting the dying, and helping the injured —police, fire officers, the ambulance service, St. John Ambulance Brigade, doctors and nurses, the staff of the club, and the football supporters who acted with such great discipline and compassion?

May I go on to welcome the Home Secretary's decision to set up a public inquiry, and express our hope that its report will lead to immediate and decisive action? May I ask the Home Secretary about the police inquiry that is to be carried out at the same time? Can we be assured that neither its proceedings nor its conclusions will delay or inhibit the public inquiry that he has announced today? We need an unequivocal and authoritative account of what happened at Hillsborough, why it happened, and what must be done to prevent such a thing from ever happening again. On the face of it, two parallel inquiries are not the best way to achieve that result.

The report emanating from the public inquiry must be followed by a reorganisation of football ground control which may take some time to achieve. I refer, for example, to the replacement of terraces with seats. But some action must be taken at once. Will the Home Secretary issue an immediate instruction to those safety committees and chief constables who have insisted upon football clubs installing perimeter fences? Many football clubs have warned for years that perimeter fencing is a potential danger. On Saturday it proved lethal. It must not be maintained where lives are put at risk.

We assume that the recommendations of the public inquiry will concern crowd control outside the turnstiles and on the way to matches—not simply organisation and accommodation inside grounds. In the light of that, will the Home Secretary consider the implications of any policy or legislation that results in concentration of crowds outside grounds immediately before matches? The potential consequences of football supporters being held in large numbers outside turnstiles was demonstrated yesterday. Nothing must be done to make such concentrations more likely or more frequent.

Most informed opinion, including that of the police, insists that the concentration of supporters outside turnstiles would be the certain result of part I of the Football Spectators Bill. This morning's decision to push that Bill through Parliament even while the inquiry is sitting is neither rational nor sensitive to the mood of the country. We shall oppose it with every legitimate means at our disposal.

I offer the co-operation of the Opposition for any legislation that is genuinely concerned with football safety. Indeed, I do more: I assure the Home Secretary of my party's profound wish that proposals on safety at football grounds can be made with the general support of all political parties and wholly free from political controversy. It will clearly be in the interests of everybody to obtain unanimous agreement on a subject that has nothing whatever to do with party politics. I ask the Home Secretary to try to achieve that agreement.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful for the earlier part of the right hon. Gentleman's statement, which expressed sentiments on which the House is united. He raised several particular points. The chief constable of South Yorkshire took the view, which I think the right hon. Gentleman will probably consider right, that since the actions of some of his force will be central to any inquiry, it is right that another force, and one with experience in these matters, should undertake the police work that is necessary both in preparation for inquests and to submit the necessary information to Lord Taylor's inquiry. Therefore, he made the announcement to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. I do not think that there is any confusion or duplication. The work to be carried out by the chief constable of the West Midlands force will be at the service of Lord Justice Taylor, and will not cut across what he does.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about barriers and perimeter fencing, and it is worth answering that point in a little detail. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, they are not a statutory requirement, but they are in many places a requirement imposed by the local authorities as a condition of the safety certificate, which is required under the law. The purpose of the barriers and in particular of the perimeter fences is to increase security and improve protection from one type of threat—that of violence.

Mr. Hattersley: Not violence—hooliganism.

Mr. Hurd: That is their purpose. We have yet to find satisfactory means of ensuring that, in removing one hazard, the authorities do not create another.

The Home Office guidance, which the right hon. Gentleman will have studied, specifically lays down the importance of exits on to the pitch through the perimeter fence for emergency purposes. No one who saw the fence and the gate at Hillsborough or listened to those who tried to get through it, often in vain, can believe that the right answer was found on that occasion. It must be for Lord Justice Taylor and the inquiry to look into that. He is aware—I discussed the matter with him this morning—that if he believes, as he may well, that there are certain matters—perhaps this one—that require an urgent interim report, so that steps can be taken in advance of the next football season, he will be able to do that.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the Football Spectators Bill. The next stage of the Bill was to have been Third Reading in another place, on Monday next. We believe that the House and the other place will agree that it is seemly to have a short delay in that. Perhaps after that delay, the best course would be for the Bill to complete its stages in the other place so that any additions that we propose in the light of my earlier statement can be introduced when it comes to this House. In the first instance, that is a matter for the usual channels in another place.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that we are all appalled at this tragedy. Our sympathy goes out to the relatives of those who have been killed and to the injured. It may not be possible for me to call every hon. Member who wishes to ask a question, but I propose to give precedence to those whose constituencies are most directly affected.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): As the Member of Parliament representing the area that covers the ground and the Northern general hospital, I wish to reiterate what has already been said in paying tribute to those who helped, in the ground, in the community around and at the two major hospitals in Sheffield, to deal with the dead and injured. I offer my sympathy and those of colleagues in the city of Sheffield to the bereaved and to those families whose relatives have been injured. I am sure that we all want to consider every possible way of avoiding such an incident ever occurring again.

I ask the Home Secretary to confirm that the Sheffield Wednesday football club has done more than most clubs in investing more than £1 million over the past 10 years in improving safety and facilities in a ground that must be one of the best of the top two or three football league grounds in the country.

I hope that the Home Secretary will confirm that the inquiry will accept the task of considering how we might change the image of football. Will it be possible for us to take a fresh look at how we treat football spectators? The behaviour of a few has led to a concentration on actions and attitudes whereby fans are treated as hooligans, or potential hooligans, rather than as human beings.

No one would condone the pressure and the late arrival of fans outside the game on Saturday, but we want to see facilities for entertainment, catering and comfort in grounds begin to restore decency and a sense of purpose. I speak as someone who sat on a small wall behind the goal at Hillsborough when I was a child without fear or anything happening to me or to those around me.

I ask the Home Secretary to reject the alleged statement this afternoon by the president of UEFA, in which he described fans as "beasts". I hope that the Home Secretary will say that we shall restore dignity and a sense of decency to our football supporters and to the viewing of football in Britain.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I agree willingly that Sheffield Wednesday has put massive investment into modern facilities at the Hillsborough ground. The terms of reference of Lord Justice Taylor are wide and will enable him to range over what he thinks is essential. I agree that those whom my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I visited yesterday in the hospitals were human beings who had suffered greatly in body and, sometimes, in mind as well. No one who made those visits could conceivably think of them in any other way.

I agree also with the main thrust of the question of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). It is by building up the comfort and the conditions of the game and its high reputation that we can attract more and more people to become spectators and restore the attractiveness of the game. That will mean raising our sights, and thinking of new ways of doing that. That is why we have come to the conclusion that seated accommodation in the larger stadiums is an important part of the objective which the hon. Gentleman states.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Our hearts go out to the bereaved families, but surely our thoughts should be concentrated on what lessons should be learned for general application thoughout the country. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary did not refer to one pressing matter. Is he aware that, over the past three years, ever since the inquiry of Mr. Justice Popplewell, the St. John Ambulance Brigade, which has unrivalled experience in providing first aid at sports grounds, has been pressing the Home Office, local authorities and the Football Association to provide much higher standards of medical care and equipment at football stadiums throughout the country?

If it has not been possible outside London to achieve these standards—in London it has been all right—will my right hon. Friend take appropriate action in advance of the inquiry? There is clearly a need to ensure that, in any breakdown where injury is inflicted, the rescue services and the magnificient work done by the St. John Ambulance Brigade are not frustrated by a lack of proper facilities.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the criticisms that have been made. He may have heard the doctor from Glasgow give his considered talk on that matter on the radio this morning. I understand that before the match began two ambulances were at the ground together with attendants from the St. John Ambulance Brigade. The first call for additional ambulances was received by the ambulance service at eight minutes past 3 and within 17 minutes a total of 10 additional ambulances had attended. We spoke yesterday to the head of the ambulance service. Its record of quick recourse is a good one. However, it does not help with my right hon. Friend's point about the facilities already at the ground. I imagine that that is a matter to which Lord Justice Taylor will want to give urgent attention.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): These are probably the most difficult questions that I have ever had to ask in the House of Commons. I say that because many of my constituents and many of the constituents of my colleagues who represent Liverpool and Merseyside, as well as elsewhere, are dead or injured because of the great tragedy at Hillsborough. I am thinking of the families and of the people who are bereaved.

It is a tragedy that should never have happened. The people of Liverpool in particular are in deep mourning but there is also a measure of anger because, as has been urged elsewhere, they feel that steps should have been taken well before the match to avoid such things happening.

Although the attitude that the Government have adopted has been sympathetic, may I urge them not to go ahead at the moment with their proposals? Please be sensitive to the feelings of our people. Is the Home Secretary aware that I have recently received letters from some of those who died urging that the Government should not introduce the scheme because they felt that it would add to the existing problems? I urge the Government: please desist at least until the report is published. Let us have another look at the situation.

May I also urge the Government to take some immediate steps? For God's sake, do not let our people be trapped like animals again. I am an Evertonian—I do not often attend Liverpool matches and I was not at this one —but I saw on television the agony and the dreadful scenes when young people, children and others had their lives crushed out of them, not only because of the perimeter fences but because of the barriers. We must ensure that this never happens again anywhere in the country.

Those who are in authority and who had not foreseen that such a situation could develop cannot run away from their responsibilities. The last thing that I want to do is to create a scapegoat and I do not want to condemn the policeman outside the ground who made a decision, thinking, perhaps, that he was saving lives. I just want us to look at the whole situation again, again and again, so that such a tragedy does not happen again.

The interests of the spectators should be put before the interests of everybody else. They must be treated as civilised human beings, not as the enemies of society. Yes, a few enemies of society may get into football grounds from time to time, but our lovely people of Liverpool—and those elsewhere—must never suffer again because they have suffered too much already.

Mr. Hurd: Anyone who watched on television the reaction of people in Liverpool, particularly at the services in and outside the cathedrals yesterday, will know that the hon. Gentleman was right in the way that he started his question. There is also absolutely no doubt from what we heard yesterday that the hon. Gentleman is right to talk about people being trapped, crushed and helpless. That leads back to the point about perimeter fences. The hon. Gentleman is right also to advise against a rush to judgment. Yesterday, we listened to many accounts of what happened from casualties and witnesses. The broad thrust of what they said tallied. However, there were discrepancies—as there usually are—on many important points of detail. It is for precisely that reason that an inquiry is needed.

There is no particular difficulty about part II of the Football Spectators Bill. As to part I, the national membership scheme is designed as a remedy against violence. Violence was not present at Hillsborough on Saturday, but it has been the curse of the game and might be again unless we find the right remedy. The remedy in the Bill flows from the Popplewell report on the last disaster —*[Interruption.]* In considering the Hillsborough disaster, it would be foolish to forget the lessons of earlier disasters.

The action that we propose is reasonable. I mentioned the parliamentary delay that we believe to be seemly. I mentioned also that we want to go forward and not back on the Football Spectators Bill and on the concept of a national membership scheme, which we believe to be necessary and right. We must go forward, to see whether the Bill's licensing provisions need to be strengthened, to make possible the move to all-seated accommodation in big stadiums, which we believe is the right way to proceed. There will be consultations and discussions about that possibility. If we reach the conclusion that the Bill needs to be altered and strengthened in that way, we shall bring that conclusion to the House.

Sir Neil Macfarlane (Sutton and Cheam): Is my right hon. Friend aware that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House wholeheartedly share his sentiments about the heroic acts that took place on Saturday? I shall be grateful if he will address his mind to two points that I will put to him. I associate myself in many ways with the comments of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the inquiry will be all-embracing, because the disaster has major implications for many other major spectator sports? Also, can the inquiry be speeded up? Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends feel that the inquiry is desperately important, even allowing for the recommendations made four years ago by Mr. Justice Popplewell. If some of them had been acknowledged, perhaps we would not find ourselves where we are today.

Does my right hon. Friend hold the opinion that it would be premature and foolhardy to proceed with the national membership scheme until he has an opportunity to consider all the contributory factors, both inside and outside the ground, to the Hillsborough tragedy? Those factors clearly included panic on the part of the police and of spectators. I am certain that it would be premature to proceed with the scheme until the inquiry has been concluded.

Mr. Hurd: Lord Justice Taylor's report must be speedy and thorough. In theory, there can be a contradiction between the two. However, I have made it clear to Lord Justice Taylor—and he accepts this—that he may encounter matters and issues that need to be tackled with particular urgency and upon which he may wish to make pressing recommendations. If that is the case, it will be open to him—and I have the impression that he will take this course—to submit an interim report on such matters before he has finished reaching all of his conclusions, so that they may be acted upon. Lord Justice Taylor has it in mind that, as with the Popplewell inquiry, the proceedings of his inquiry will be in public, unless there is a particular reason in any case against allowing that. That is the procedure. I do not want to pin Lord Justice Taylor down to a specific timetable before he has even visited Sheffield, which he is to do tomorrow, but I hope that my hon. Friend feels reassured.

I note what my hon. Friend said about the comments of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), and he will have noted what I said in reply. I agree to the extent that we need to set our sights high, and that, apart from other considerations, a delay would be seemly. As I have said, we shall need to look at the Bill to see how it might be strengthened to meet the extra points that I have mentioned. I do not consider that it would be right or sensible to resile from the concept of a national membership scheme or from that of designated grounds for reasons that I have already given. If Lord Justice Taylor wishes to comment on that, nothing in his terms of reference will prevent him from doing so.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, let me offer my sympathy to the bereaved and injured. Let me also acknowledge the efforts of those who rendered assistance, especially the unsung acts of heroism performed by many young people.

I should like to press the Home Secretary a little on the scope of the inquiry. Will it be wide enough to enable the inquiry to consider whether lessons should have been learned from an alleged incident in 1981, in the same part of the same ground? It is said that there was severe overcrowding on that occasion, but mercifully no one was killed or injured.

The Home Secretary would receive support from both sides of the House if he took a much more robust attitude to the football membership scheme. Many of us feel that even proceeding in the way that he has outlined will inevitably pre-empt Lord Justice Taylor's report.

Mr. Hurd: On the second point, I do not think that I have anything to add to what I have already said. As for the first point, Lord Justice Taylor will of course be able to look at evidence from the past if he considers if relevant.

The hon. and learned Gentleman asked me about the kind of issues that Lord Justice Taylor will need to address. I have already mentioned the decision to open the outside gate. There is also the question why, once in the ground, fans were propelled into the central tunnel rather than to the side entrances to the terraces, and the question why those responsible did not notice earlier what was happening on the central terrace behind the goal posts. Then there is the whole question—which we have already discussed—of the perimeter barrier and the gates within it, which were designed to serve as an emergency exit but which obviously failed to do so.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): As my right hon. Friend knows, I am one of the strongest supporters of the Football Spectators Bill, and I remain committed to the principle of membership to combat football hooliganism. Does my right hon. Friend accept, however, that in consideration of what has been said this afternoon—and, indeed, of the tragic circumstances—it would be wise to postpone any further discussion until the full results of the public inquiry are known? I hope that my right hon. Friend will then bring to the House a Bill that will receive not merely all-party support but support from outside the House, to combat the terrible problems that have been highlighted by Saturday's tragic events.

Mr. Hurd: As I have said, there will be a pause for the sake of seemliness—as the House would wish—and also for consultations on the possible strengthening of the Bill. Both purposes are, I think, important from the point of view of my hon. Friend.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the events at Hillsborough ought to make us all step aside from preconceptions and look afresh at how we are to find a better way for British football. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] However, I think that my hon. Friend will agree, even if the Opposition do not, that an important part of that must be protection against hooliganism and violence,

[Mr. Hurd]

and that in that context a national membership scheme, or the kind that flows from the Popplewell report, has a crucial part to play.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Ashfield): I was at the match on Saturday and saw everything that happened. If those events had taken place at a mid-week Cup tie replay on a black, dark January night, with people dashing from work in the rush hour trying to get in, it would have been twice as bad. Most of the fans had a ticket, which is a form of membership card. If the Secretary of State introduces a computer system and a membership card, all we shall need is one idiot to take a piece of chewing gum and jam it into the slot. That would put the turnstile out of action. The police would then have no option but to allow people to rush into the ground through the emergency exit. They would not then be in a position, especially on a dark night, to direct the fans to the proper entrances.

If this tragedy had happened after the Football Spectators Bill had been introduced, the Secretary of State would certainly have had to resign. Will he not wait until the report is published? In the meantime, will he not arrange for the barriers to be taken down? Will he not insist that all big matches are played live on television on Sunday afternoons so that there is less reason for people without tickets to turn up at the ground, as they did on Saturday, and fewer traffic problems? If the Secretary of State took those interim measures and introduced in the next Session of Parliament a safety of sports grounds Bill, we should certainly support him.

Mr. Hurd: The tragedy happened under the existing system, not under any future system. *[Interruption.]* No, the hon. Gentleman has not proved that point. Part of the problem on Saturday, as on other occasions, was that people turned up without tickets, as the hon. Gentleman said, in the belief, which tragically turned out to be correct, that some of them would find a way in. Under the scheme, that would not have been possible because they would or would not have a football membership card. They would not travel to the game in the expectation that they would be let in without one.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Police Federation welcomes both the public and the police inquiry? Will the inquiry particularly consider the safety of stadiums and will it have the power to recommend temporary closure, should that prove necessary? Can he also say whether the inquiry will further consider how supporters travel to matches, the parking arrangements and the way in which supporters approach the ground? Can he further say whether the inquiry will consider the role of the Football Association in connection with the proposed football membership scheme?

Mr. Hurd: We have deliberately cast very widely the terms of reference for Lord Justice Taylor, so that he can examine all those matters that my hon. Friend has listed, I believe without straining at the terms of reference. There are many angles to this—many points of comment and criticism that have already arisen, even in the last 48 hours—and it is right that Lord Justice Taylor should be able to look at them all. The existing system of safety certificates under the 1975 Act and the responsibility of local authorities—how that works out in practice and whether it is right, as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) pointed out earlier, that perimeter fences should in many cases be regarded as a requirement for a safety certificate—are matters on which Lord Justice Taylor could comment.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): We all grieve today, but some of us are angry. I speak not only as a Sheffield Member of Parliament but also as someone who still stands on the popular side week in, week out. Is the Home Secretary aware that, in the aftermath of Heysel and Bradford, I wrote to his Department and described the extensive improvements that had been put in hand at Hillsborough, costing £750,000 for crowd control and police liaison, and that I invited the Minister who was then responsible for these matters to come up and see them? He did not. Will he caution those who would make whipping boys of Sheffied Wednesday and the South Yorkshire police? Will he concentrate on those who, in trying to shape our safety requirements since Heysel and Bradford, have taken us in a impractical and unreal direction?

Will the right hon. Gentleman look hard at football—its structure, greed and psyche, and its contempt for ordinary working-class lads—and ask how far the football establishment is responsible for the continuing slaughter? During the past three or four years cages have been set up to contain visiting supporters at football grounds that detain them more severely than prisoners of war were detained in world war 2 Britain.

Mr. Hurd: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is unreal and wrong, at this stage and with our present knowledge to look for, or talk about, whipping boys. I am glad that, from the Opposition Benches and from all parts of the House, that has been stated clearly. As the hon. Gentleman said, we have endured—and football supporters in particular have endured—a series of tragedies at home and abroad. We have had a tragic fire, a number of tragedies brought about by violence—Birmingham and Heysel—and now a tragedy brought about not by violence but by physical pressures because too many people were concentrated in one narrow part of the ground.

Each of those different tragedies has brought forth a series of answers, inquiries, reports and guidance designed to avert a recurrence of the most recent tragedy—the one that is on everyone's mind. We must not forget the earlier lessons as we concentrate on the new lessons. We must look at the whole picture. That includes protection against violence and hooliganism and what Popplewell said about fire. It also includes the problems that we have naturally been discussing following the Hillsborough tragedy—the problems of perimeter fences and pressure exerted on people by physical objects that can wound and crush them. Unless we are prepared to consider all these matters, we shall continue to chase partial solutions. That was the nature of my statement today.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): May I join the hon. Members for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and Sheffield, Atterliffe (Mr. Duffy) in speaking about the tragedy that occurred in Sheffield? I pay my compliments to the emergency services on the way in which they handled themselves at the weekend and to Sheffield people who volunteered to give accommodation to those from Liverpool who were bereaved. When I visited the

temporary morgue that had been set up with my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport I was appalled by the tragedy. Only when one sees the bodies laid out can one fully appreciate the extent of the tragedy that happened in Sheffield.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to bear in mind that it was apparent to me that there was a lack of a disaster plan for that sports ground, which is one of the major sports grounds in the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member for Attercliffe said, there are few better grounds than that ground. Nevertheless, shortcomings were apparent.

I congratulate the two radio stations, Radio Hallam and Radio Sheffield, which kept up a non-stop commentary on what help was needed for people in the area and the Sheffield *Star* on its special edition—a copy of which I gave to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister —which showed graphically the horror and mayhem.

Will my right hon. Friend examine two questions—first, the apparent lack of a disaster plan and, secondly, the part that alcohol played in the disaster?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is right to the extent that Lord Justice Taylor will have to look very carefully at the shortcomings in control and communication which seem to have been present at the crucial moments that afternoon. If the hon. Gentleman's second point becomes substantiated, it will certainly fall within Lord Justice Taylor's terms of reference.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Can I say to the Home Secretary that I am probably one of the few people in the House who was at the game, if it can be called a game. I was in the Leppings lane area and I was pinned against a wall for about 20 minutes. One of my immediate observations was the inadequate policing of the Leppings lane entrance. People were coming down the road in quite large numbers and there was virtually no direction. What could have and should have happened is that the outer gates to that enclosure should have been closed to limit the number of people within it. That did not happen, and the police cannot be blamed for removing themselves from within that enclosure as the crushing became greater.

In my view the disaster had nothing to do with late arrivals. When I go to Anfield road to see a football match, I arrive at ten to 3 and walk through with no problem at all, because the policing there is quite adequate and the crowds are broken up by the police outside the ground.

As has been said, football supporters have been virtually disregarded because of the behaviour of a tiny minority of fans, and have been typecast as gorillas and inhuman people. That image develops in the mind of police, politicians and others the idea that everyone who goes to watch a football match falls into that category, and that influences the way that people treat football supporters. That did not happen in Sheffield, because the community around the football ground understood the situation, because their sons, daughters, fathers and brothers are probably football fans. They gave immediate sustenance and help to the football supporters. I wish to express my gratitude to the working-class people in Sheffield who did all they could to assist those who were distressed and injured and to deal with other minor matters.

I do not understand how the Home Secretary can continue to defend a scheme that, had it been in operation on that day, would have caused even greater damage, if that is possible. It is about time that the football industry, the Home Secretary, the House and society in general concentrated their minds on bringing in legislation to make football grounds safe and deal with the hooligan element. No genuine football supporter wants to tolerate that. We want those people rooted out of our sport, and they can be rooted out.

But let us not categorise football spectators so that anybody and everybody will look for an excuse not to listen to them. They know about the grounds, as they visit them week after week, and they know where the faults lie. I hope the Home Secretary will say that the inquiry will have full regard to those people who go to football matches and know the problems. If we listen to them and act upon what they say, the game will be brought back to what it was—a game that families can watch and enjoy without any danger to themselves or to other people.

Mr. Hurd: I hope indeed that football supporters will find their voices and mobilise their ideas and put them to Lord Justice Taylor, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman has given. As regards the police, there was no shortage of police officers—there were upwards of 770 police officers in or around the ground. The hon. Gentleman will agree that many of them showed great heroism for an hour or more trying to extricate people, help people and restore people to consciousness and life.

Of course he is right to say that, as the chief constable has recognised, the decisions of the police and the general question of control and communication will have to be examined by Lord Justice Taylor.

Because of the passionate loyalty of so many for football—we all know of it even if we do not share it—it must be right to do everything we can to restore the game's reputation.

Several Hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask for brief questions on this matter, please, because a great many hon. Members wish to take part, and it is difficult if long questions are asked.

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I am sure the House and the country sense the feeling of tragedy that every person on Merseyside feels today because of the events of Saturday, when what should have been one of the great showpieces of our sporting calendar turned into such a tragedy. On behalf of my constituents and all the people of Merseyside who were helped, I thank the people of Sheffield for all they did. I am sure that I can speak for all my colleagues on Merseyside when I say that our heartfelt sympathy goes to the families of all those who were bereaved, including the family of a 17-year-old boy from Crosby who was named today as one of the dead. It is an absolute tragedy.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement about a wide-ranging inquiry. May I ask him to take one particular thing on board, because many lessons must be learned from the events at Hillsborough on Saturday? Will he see that part of the inquiry looks at the way in which the Football Association allocates tickets to the clubs involved in major sporting occasions? For clubs such as Liverpool, Manchester United, Everton, Arsenal and Tottenham, with huge followings, the allocation is often fearfully

[Mr. Malcolm Thornton]

inadequate and exacerbates a problem which should not exist but which we all know was part and parcel of the problem causing the fatal events on Saturday.

Mr. Hurd: That point will certainly come within the review. There seems to be a general opinion—Lord Justice Taylor will test this—that there was still room at the Liverpool end of the ground. The trouble was not that the total space was overcrowded but that particular area—*[Interruption.]* Yes, as the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) said, the distribution was wrong. That is what I was referring to when I talked of people being propelled through the central tunnel rather than directed round the sides where there was access to parts of the Liverpool terraces. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw also mentioned that people came from Liverpool without tickets in the hope of getting in. Both those facts aggravated the situation.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Yesterday afternoon at this time, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and myself, together with dignitaries from the three cities involved, were standing on the turf in front of where all those people were killed. Everyone stood silently; there were no photographers present. Our hearts went out from Sheffield to the people of Liverpool. The heart of Sheffield is collectively a great heart and the people of Sheffield are appalled at what happened. The last time I stood in such a way was a long time ago during the war. The sense of what had occurred was horrific to me, and, I hope, to everybody.

We all have our opinions about what went wrong. I know the ground intimately, the exact spot and all the details, but I do not want to apportion blame now. When the inquiry takes place, we should all realise that it is the most important inquiry in the history of football in this country and what it decides will decide the future of football. Football is a dynamic, not a static, sport. It will not stand still and will never go away—thank heaven—but we want to make the proper decisions.

Therefore, I want voices that say, "Do it rapidly," to be listened to with much care. I do not want skimping. The decisions that we take must be long-term decisions. Every aspect must be considered; otherwise, this will occur again and we shall once again need to have another melancholy inquiry into what went wrong. I want an assurance from the Secretary of State that we shall have such an inquiry and that it will not be rushed in any way whatever.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman said. I should like to mention the generosity of the people of Sheffield, which has been evident. I have heard many stories of offers of help, accommodation and transport to complete strangers from his constituents and other citizens of Sheffield.

I repeat, without wishing to be tedious, what seems to be the crux of the matter. We have had a series of disasters and tragedies arising from different causes and circumstances. We must not simply ignore the earlier lessons and concentrate on the latest ones. The latest one is terrible and perhaps more appalling than the others because of its nature. It therefore needs to be thoroughly and urgently investigated, and the totals must be added together to find a new way for British football. The hon. Gentleman rightly said that the inquiry must be dynamic. There must be no resting on ancient attitudes as the right foundation for the future of the game.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I am sure that the House will join me in sending condolences to the families of Colin Sefton and David Rimmer, constituents of mine, who died, and Robert Graham, who is fighting for his life in intensive care. May I express, on behalf of the people of Skelmersdale and Ormskirk, who are ardent Liverpool supporters, our appreciation of the Sheffield services, which acted so quickly?

I support my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the introduction of all-seated grounds, which I have advocated for some time and regard as a solution. Will he return to the Bradford City fire report by Mr. Justice Popplewell, in which he will find among the 63 recommendations one that says that it is essential to have exit gates in perimeter fencing that keeps in the crowd to give an exit on to the field should there be disturbances? Will he reconsider that and bear in mind that such gates do not exist at 16 first division grounds, including Manchester United's ground, Old Trafford, where it is proposed to hold the rematch of this game in the next week or two?

Mr. Hurd: One point on which we can all agree is the absolute necessity of emergency exits through perimeter fences. As my hon. Friend said, that is contained in the Popplewell report and is clearly spelled out, with specifications about the widths of gates, in paragraph 215 of the Home Office guide to safety at sports grounds. Anyone will agree that if the guidance is implemented it is adequate. There must be an investigation in to why the exit gate was not an effective way in which desperate people could get on to the pitch.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): In the face of this terrible and wholly avoidable tragedy—many of the fatalities were young children, including a 13-year-old boy from my constituency—expressions of condolences and sympathy seem inadequate to sum up the enormity of it for a city that is mourning its dead and is united in its grief.

A time will come when grief will give way to anger and questions will have to be answered. I should like an assurance from the Home Secretary that it will be made clear why the gate was opened and who took that decision. Why were emergency arrangements so pitifully inadequate? I welcome what the right hon. Gentleman said about the provision of seats in our national stadiums, but will he take urgent action to ensure that those terrible metal cages are put on the scrap heap and people are treated like human beings instead of animals?

On 22 March, I wrote to the Minister about the ticket allocation for Saturday's match. I enclosed a statement from Mr. Peter Robinson, the chief executive of Liverpool football ground, who said:

> "I made it plain that there was no way I could support the choice of Hillsborough this year with the same ticket allocations applying."

When I received a reply dated 11 April from the Minister of Sport, he said that the mater was entirely for the football authorities. In the light of what has happened, will the Home Secretary accept that the Minister should take an interest in this matter? Will he confirm that which the Minister said, that the allocations were made on the basis of police advice? I ask that because there have been conflicting statements in the past 24 hours.

Liverpool is a city schooled in adversity. However, not since the blitz has it had to face a tragedy on such a shocking scale. I am sure that the House today will wish to express its solidarity with those who grieve and those awaiting news of loved ones, whose lives still lie in the balance.

Mr. Hurd: All the points raised by the hon. Gentleman are clearly covered by the terms of reference of the inquiry, and Lord Justice Taylor will be able to look into them. I am slightly surprised that he suggests that Ministers should become involved in deciding, match by match, how tickets should be allocated. He is perfectly right in his understanding—these are matters for the football authorities. They consult on them and are guided by the police. I shall repeat my earlier point that, although the matter of total allocation will certainly be looked into, it was not the total allocation, so much as the concentration of that allocation in a part of the Liverpool terrace, which resulted in the terrible damage.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): May I, as a regular supporter of the Nottingham Forest team, speak on behalf of all its fans and the people of Nottinghamshire, and associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer)? It was a most tragic accident and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, no words uttered in this place will fill the gaps in those families who have lost young people who went out on a happy day which ended in tragedy.

We should recollect that more factors unite football fans than divide them. That was clearly shown at the Hillsborough ground when the Nottingham Forest supporters—as soon as they realised that a tragedy was taking place—behaved in an exemplary fashion and helped in every way. The majority of people who follow football are united in the game's interests. The Home Secretary has an opportunity to utilise that good will on all sides. There is no shortage of suggestions or ideas. I beg him not to rush ahead too far but to think carefully before he proceeds in any direction. He should take all the advice given from all those of good will who want the future of football—this country's national game—to continue in a proper and rightful way.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend that the right sequence of action is thought, consultation, thought, action.

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Like thousands of Liverpool families on Saturday, my wife and I waited tearfully and anxiously because we had two sons and a nephew in that part of the ground where the disaster happened. My relief on discovering that my family was all right was tinged with the realisation that thousands of other Liverpool families would never see their kids come home as a result of the terrible tragedy. After the Heysel tragedy we were assured that the Prime Minister would leave no stone unturned in discovering who was responsible. I want an assurance today from the Home Secretary that, similarly, no stone will be left unturned when this incident is investigated.

Others have said that they are not looking for scapegoats, but the anger that permeates Liverpool today reflects the tragedy that occurred in Georgia in the USSR, after which the top tier of the country's leadership was forced to resign. We need assurances, because we do not want a whitewash. The fans are paramount in this incident, and must be consulted when the in-depth inquiry takes place—no matter how long it takes for their point of view and experiences to be put across. If they were decent, honest and honourable, the responsible Minister, chief of police and FA officials would resign.

How long are we going to carry on treating fans like cattle? Their treatment contrasts with the champagne swilling that goes on in the plush directors' boxes. The views and conditions of the fans must be taken into account. If we lock people up we create a certain mentality, and it is little wonder that they react in these circumstances.

Mr. Hurd: Nothing that we heard yesterday at the ground or in the hospitals bears out the sort of rhetoric that the hon. Gentleman has sought to employ. It is precisely because of the incredible nature of the tragedy that we have moved quickly to set up what even the hon. Gentleman would agree is a fully independent inquiry with what even he would agree are wide and complete terms of reference. The proceedings will be conducted in public, unless there is a special reason for not doing so. It will be open to everyone to make their views and recommendations known. That is the proper way to proceed and then to reach conclusions afterwards—instead of gabbling with malice, as the hon. Gentleman has done today.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I ask my right hon. Friend to think again about putting the Football Spectators Bill on ice. Is he aware that many of the police are concerned that if the Bill is enacted and crowds build up outside stadiums the same sort of thing could happen again as happened on Saturday? Would it not be better to wait for the results of a full inquiry and then to bring forward a Bill that is acceptable to everyone concerned with football?

Secondly, was my right hon. Friend, like me, nauseated by some of the pictures in some of the tabloids, which must have caused enormous distress to some of the bereaved families? Would it not have been better if they had never been published?

Mr. Hurd: On the first point, perhaps I can add something to what I have already said. I remind the House, which has not yet considered the Bill, that it is an enabling framework and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has already given a full commitment not to implement the scheme within that framework until the necessary technology has been satisfactorily worked out. My hon. Friend will agree that the point about terraces that I emphasised at the beginning is also relevant.

I note what my hon. Friend said about newspaper photographs, and I also note that the new chairman of the Press Council has said today that the Press Council should inquire into that matter.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I was at the other semi-final on Saturday at which the other Merseyside team, Everton, was successful, but there was no real rejoicing. When we came out of the ground and learned of the problems at Hillsborough, we were all united in grief with all football fans on Merseyside.

Will the Home Secretary use his influence to get football clubs to be more flexible about kick-off times? One of the reasons why crowds try to crush through turnstiles

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

quickly into the central areas of grounds is that they hear the roar from inside the ground when the teams run on to the pitch and play starts. Matches in Germany are often held up for half an hour to ensure the safety of the spectators, which should come first.

When, oh when, will the Government escape from the "We never make mistakes" syndrome? When will they learn from their Back Benchers, not one of whom has supported them this afternoon, withdraw part I of the Football Spectators Bill and start from scratch?

Will the Home Secretary ensure that the inquiry examines the location of football grounds? I know that there can be improvement—by relocating grounds when necessary—only in the long term, but too many of our grounds are in built-up urban areas. Because of the war, Germany and Holland have been able to build grounds in open space areas in which there are far more facilities for controlling crowds. Will the right hon. Gentleman look into that?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask for brief questions; long questions are unfair to other hon. Members.

Mr. Hurd: I shall try to be succinct. I have much personal sympathy for the hon. Gentleman's point about flexibility and timing of the start of matches. I am sure that that will be looked into. I have nothing further to say on the other matter.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): May I on behalf of my constituents and supporters of Manchester United join in the expressions of sympathy to the families of the bereaved? Will my right hon. Friend have urgent consultations with the football authorities to ensure that in future special coaches and trains for away matches do not leave their points of origin unless everybody on board is already armed with a ticket? That would avoid thousands of fans, many of them without tickets, arriving simultaneously five or 10 minutes before the start of a match.

Mr. Hurd: That is an interesting suggestion and I shall make sure that the inquiry takes it into account.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): I should like to be associated with the condolences and the messages of sympathy to the bereaved families. I pay tribute to the Liverpool supporters and the Evertonians for their tribute to Liverpool yesterday at Anfield and at Liverpool metropolitan cathedral. I was present at both those ceremonies and they were very moving. My brother's son lost three friends on Saturday, all of whom were in their twenties. That was a tragic loss of life. I welcome the public inquiry and hope that there will be no cover-ups. Such a tragedy must never happen again, although any preventive measures are too late for all those people who are now dead.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and with the way in which he expressed himself.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): My constituents are shocked that even the London suburbs should now be associated with this terrible tragedy. Sarah and Victoria Hicks, two teenage girls attending the match with their family, now lie dead. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the shadow of this tragedy it would be easy to jump to conclusions and adopt what might be fashionable solutions? Will he give us an assurance that the widest possible brief will be followed by the inquiry to ensure that we can genuinely call our sports grounds safe? Will he ensure that all recommendations by the inquiry are legislated into action?

Mr. Hurd: Certainly, as my hon. Friend will have seen, the terms of reference are very wide. When we receive the report—whether it is an interim and then a final or a single report—we will need to act quickly.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The whole House knows that we have a heavy day ahead of us. I shall call those Members whose constituents have been most severely affected, the Liverpool Members, and then we must move on.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): May I, too, associate myself with the statements made to the families who lost people on Saturday? I find it impossible to express the despair that I feel and that suggests something of the utter desolation that those families must be experiencing at this time. While none of those families will today be thinking about compensation, does the Home Secretary think that we have a duty to them? Am I right in saying that some families who lost members on Saturday will receive no automatic compensation payments? Is that right or fair? If it is not fair, will the Government change the law?

Mr. Hurd: I think that the hon. Gentleman is right in saying that there is no automatic compensation. Of course I have read about the possibilities of civil action and I have also read and spoken about the fund that has been set up. I should like to look further into the matter.

Mr. Sean Hughes (Knowsley, South): I represent half the borough that is today mourning the deaths of 12 young people, including the infinitely tragic death of a 10-year-old child from my constituency. As an Everton season ticket holder, I was at the other semi-final. As a football supporter I share the disappointment of many people at the Home Secretary's reply about the ID scheme which demonstrates a woeful ignorance of the nature of the football fan. Increasingly, in the greatest spectator sport in Britain, the least important person is the spectator. We feel very deeply that the Government and the Football Association do not demonstrate an awareness of that fact.

Finally, in addition to the disappointment that has been caused by what we have heard about the ID scheme, there will be disappointment about the Home Secretary's response to questions concerning the allocation of tickets. I remain absolutely convinced that the allocation of tickets for big games, such as semi-finals and finals, is crucial. Going to a football match is not like going to the theatre; it is a way of life for an enormous number of people. Those people will be acutely disappointed by what has been said about the allocation of tickets. The fans who turn up without tickets, and those who pay exorbitant amounts to ticket touts, are not the ones who are intent on hooliganism; they are the ones who have been going, match in, match out, throughout the season, but cannot get tickets for the big games. Therefore, the Football Association too must be thoroughly investigated.

Mr. Hurd: I agree entirely that the allocation of tickets—working out the totals between the two clubs—is extremely important. What I was arguing against was the argument of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), that this is a matter that Ministers should decide.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I should like to associate myself with the sympathy that has been expressed. At the invitation of the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority, I visited Sheffield yesterday. I was very touched indeed by the response of some Nottingham Forest supporters, who had organised a collection in their pub the previous evening and had come to the ground to present more than £100 towards the appeal fund. It was very helpful of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) to make arrangements so that those of us who came over were able to find our way around and could go to the appropriate places.

Having spoken to several people who came over to Sheffield yesterday to find out what had happened to their relatives, I think it is clear that the emergency telephone system simply did not work satisfactorily on Saturday. I spoke to one woman who had tried for eight hours to find out what had happened to her son, but had been unable to get through. I understand from the fire and civil defence authority that an exercise was conducted recently—using the Bristol exchange—aimed at dealing with precisely such problems, and that that exercise was relatively successful. On this occasion, the provision of far more lines would have enabled the emergency telephone number to work more effectively. I understand that that system was used for the flotation of the British Gas shares. If it was good enough for the flotation of the British Gas shares, it would have been good enough as an emergency system.

Mr. Hurd: As the hon. Member has said, there certainly was a problem of swamped lines, as there often is on these occasions. I understand absolutely the distress, anxiety, and worse, caused by that, but I think that it is rather apart from the terms of reference of the inquiry. Perhaps I may look into the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised and then get in touch with him.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): In view of the fact that fans from St. Helens died at Hillsborough on Saturday, I want to associate myself with the condolences that have been expressed.

Can the Home Secretary confirm that the trouble started outside the ground because of the late arrival of fans and the inability of the turnstiles to cope with them? Will he ask Lord Justice Taylor to look into the traffic arrangements for visiting fans, bearing in mind the abysmal signposting and the sometimes rather odd decisions of traffic police when they are directing fans towards the ground?

Secondly, can the Home Secretary inform us that the South Yorkshire police will reply directly to the inquiry, and will not allow the West Midlands police to answer on their behalf?

Mr. Hurd: The question of traffic and signposting is certainly within the terms of reference of the inquiry, and I shall make sure that it is noted.

On the second point, as I explained earlier, the chief constable believes—and I think that he is quite right—that since the actions of some of his officers are obviously a matter for the investigation, it is right, for the credibility of the exercise, that the police preparing the information for Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry, let alone for eventual inquests, should not belong to the same force. Therefore, the chief constable looked for, and found, another force and another chief constable with a high reputation and with experience in these matters to do that job on their behalf. I think that that is the right course.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): As somebody who has constituents who are now dead, or are relatives of those who are dead as result of this tragedy, and as someone who lived in Sheffield for 25 years, I have a dual interest in this matter. Will the Home Secretary take one urgent step, which I hope is non-controversial? Will he arrange that all the film coverage and the pictures that were taken on Saturday both by ITN and the BBC and by amateurs be made available to the inquiry? Unless we move quickly, that footage may be lost and it contains evidence that may be of great value to the inquiry, because it will enable the inquiry to see the pressures both inside and outside the ground, and allow it to draw some valuable conclusions.

Mr. Hurd: I know that there are sometimes difficulties about this material, but that is a valuable suggestion, and I shall pursue it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will now call two Back-Bench Members from each side, and then we must move on.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I shall not comment on the Hillsborough ground itself, but my right hon. Friend will be aware that in many grounds, the facilities are deplorable. Will he have discussions with his colleagues in the Treasury to see whether the tax system can be adapted so that there is an incentive to invest in improved stadiums, and a disincentive to spend ludicrous sums on transfer fees? I do not expect my right hon. Friend to make any decision about the Football Spectators Bill this afternoon, but will he say that the Government will reflect on the views that have been expressed in the House this afternoon?

Mr. Hurd: I have noted those views on the Bill. I believe that the Bill, which addresses a different problem from the one that caused the tragedy at Hillsborough, is soundly based. There will be a pause, as I have said, and there is a case for adding to the Bill and strengthening it. However, the improvement that we are seeking for football cannot be total without a provision along the lines of a national membership scheme. On the first matter, my hon. Friend is touching on a point that is sensitive in the football industry, but he is right to say that those in it must examine carefully the priorities for spending their not inconsiderable resources.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I associate myself with all the remarks made by my Sheffield colleagues on the Opposition Benches. I was at the ground, with my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth). I ask the Home Secretary to take action on perimeter fencing. Yesterday, I spoke to some experienced engineers, one of whom said that this was an accident waiting to happen. I call on the Home Secretary to ensure that no major games are played with fans kept behind perimeter fencing.

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

Today, the media have been singled out, and the local radio stations in Sheffield, both Radio Hallam and Radio Sheffield, played a major part in helping to co-ordinate the magnificent efforts made by the Sheffield people in, for example, blood donation and other services, and the arrangements between the Liverpool and Sheffield families. When the Home Secretary looks at the White Paper on broadcasting and particularly at that part dealing with local radio, I ask him to bear that effort in mind. Local radio showed what magnificent assistance it can give in a tragedy.

My main point to the Home Secretary is that he should consider carefully the removal of those fences. I think he will find that all the major engineers were saying that that was an accident waiting to happen.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about local radio. The perimeter fences are not there by accident. They are there because local authorities, to issue safety certificates, have often required them as a form of protection against violence.

Mr. Hattersley: No, against hooliganism.

Mr. Hurd: The danger of violence has not gone away. What is required is a way to reconcile the need to protect spectators against violence with the need for people to be able to get out on to the pitch, or to get back in the case of emergency. That is tackled in the Home Office guidance, but it did not work successfully at Hillsborough. That is the nature of the problem that the inquiry will have to tackle.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn, Hatfield): Is not the Football Spectators Bill about separating the hooligans from the football fans? It is an enabling Bill and the FMA and football itself will put forward a scheme for the Secretary of State to approve.

Are there any plans to introduce legislation to remove the control of football from the Football Association and the Football League, which have consistently been incompetent and, some would say, bloody-minded in their attitude to football spectators? Can my right hon. Friend assure us that football families will be able to go to football grounds in safety and be safe within those grounds?

Mr. Hurd: On the second point, there is evidence of thinking ahead, which I welcome. I notice that Mr. Graham Kelly said on television that he supports the move towards all-seated matches in important stadiums, and I notice that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), with his experience, agrees. It is partly because of the evidence of fresh thinking among the football authorities that we have given that suggestion the impetus that I have announced today.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): At the end of these questions, I ask the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister to reflect on the view, which has come from both sides of the House, that, in the light of Saturday—we all saw it on our televisions and have read the newspapers and the views of interested parties—the Government should withdraw the Football Supporters Bill? They would not be losing political face, in the light of the feelings that have been expressed. The Taylor report will look at these matters afresh—those are the words of the Home Secretary. The police inquiry, under the chief constable of the West Midlands force, is a statutory inquiry. It will be looking, legalistically but carefully, at the role of the police.

Why not wait until those reports are out and come back with a new Bill? I am sceptical about the identity card scheme, and I say that from experience because I live alongside the Leeds United football ground. However, if the reports are in favour of identity cards, I would be prepared to change my mind. Therefore, the Bill should be abandoned until the reports are in.

Mr. Hurd: I have listened to the right hon. Gentleman and to others who have said this. The comments would be just if this tragedy had occurred under the new regime. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman knows the origins of this proposal. He knows the recommendation in the final Popplewell report and the nature of the scheme. He knows, as I have said and as my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn, Hatfield (Mr. Evans) has just confirmed, that the Bill sets up an enabling framework. He knows that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has already committed himself not to implement the membership scheme, which is the core of part I, within the enabling framework, until satisfactory arrangements have been worked out. He knows what is in the Bill about the making of those arrangements. The right hon. Gentleman is accustomed to seeing things in the round and I do not believe that he would argue that, because there was no violence at Hillsborough, which I concede, we can forget the lessons of earlier disasters where there was violence, and which were examined by Mr. Justice Popplewell.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): On behalf of all those who were present on Saturday to face first the trauma and then the grief of what happened, I ask the Home Secretary firmly to repudiate the provocative, inaccurate and disgraceful statements made by representatives of UEFA and FIFA. In particular, Mr. Jacques Georges said:

"This region seems to have a particularly aggressive mentality."

He drew comparisons with Heysel, and said that the fans were "savages". Sepp Blatter of FIFA said:

"Will the fans never learn?"

Will the Home Secretary support us—I speak with the authority of the Football Association and the Football League—in totally rejecting that suggestion, that the Liverpool supporters and fans were in any way responsible for this tragedy? The Home Secretary would carry us all with him if he did so.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to realise that there is a difference between crowd behaviour control and crowd safety. As one who was there on Saturday, I know that there was no crisis management there. There was no apparent relationship between the fears of those outside the ground and the danger to those inside the ground. There was no appreciation or understanding expressed about conditions and delays on motorways and of the effect that they would have on late arrival at the ground. There was no proper crowd control and no arrangements were apparent inside the ground for dealing with the disaster and with the mass of injuries and deaths which had to be dealt with. It was not apparent that any member of the police force—I do not say this critically—understood that the first priority was to get the fences

down and to get the 10,000 spectators on to the field, that being the only possible place to which they could be evacuated.

I turn to the controversial aspect of the Home Secretary's statement. Lord Justice Taylor's appointment to conduct the inquiry is a commendable choice and I fully support it. Is he to proceed with his inquiry on the assumption that the Football Spectators Bill will be enacted? It will have a profound effect upon his thinking, and that is one of the reasons why the Bill should be withdrawn.

Many of us are distressed by the adversarial philosophy that the Government practise on sport as in other matters. They never trust the supporters associations, and the Minister has not even suggested that the association be appointed a member of the Football Membership Authority. It is my experience, having dealt with the association in recent months, that there is enormous collective wisdom and good will to be harnessed, especially from football supporters and their associations' representatives. Will the Minister please take counsel from them? Will he listen to what they say, as should the police and the football authorities? The good will has to be tapped.

I say to the Home Secretary as gently as I can, but I am afraid harshly, that the decision to continue with the Football Spectators Bill in all these circumstances is a profound mistake. It is appalling arrogance for the Government to think that they know better than anyone else. The Government never consult the Opposition on these matters. They never consult football generally about these matters. As far as I can see—*[Interruption.]* It is true. The Minister for Sport may get upset, but three times I have offered from the Opposition Dispatch Box to formulate a policy that would, in effect, cross the House. I have never been invited to meet the Minister to discuss these matters. This is disgraceful and it is time that this lack of discussion came to an end.

I hope that the Home Secretary will reflect on what he has said today. He keeps telling us that the Government will proceed with the scheme because of previous violence, but there has been no substantial violence within football grounds for three years.

I am grateful to the Prime Minister for remaining in her place throughout the exchanges to listen to what everyone has to say, but I say to her and to the Home Secretary that anyone who was present on Saturday, as I was, will know that advocates of a membership scheme that requires harassed gatekeepers, in addition to their great traumas and problems, to inspect cards, possibly to look at photographs, and then to put the cards into a machine, are saying, in effect, that they wanted the disaster to be aggravated. That is the essence of the problem.

I ask the Home Secretary to try to achieve a consensus within football generally and within the House so that we can all agree to get through this place a Bill to deal with football troubles, whether they be behavioural or are related to ground safety. If we are all convinced about the merits of such a Bill, we shall be happy to support it and to secure its passage in record time. I ask the Home Secretary to take on board the collective view of everyone in the country, except the members of Her Majesty's Government, that the Football Spectators Bill should be withdrawn in the interest of public safety.

Mr. Hurd: I have not read the generalisations which the right hon. Gentleman quoted at the beginning of his intervention. If they are as he stated, they are certainly wholly unjustified by what occurred at Hillsborough. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for getting in touch with me on Saturday night. He is correct in saying that the problems of control and communications, some of which he listed, are central to the inquiry.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) concluded the exchanges by using what happened at Hillsborough as a stick to beat the Football Spectators Bill—*[Interruption.]* That is what he did. He is straining and upsetting history to argue that the approach of my right hon. Friends has been arrogant or adversarial. I have been present at several meetings at which my right hon. Friends and my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport have been straining nerves to try to carry football with them. They have done this year after year. What is the date of the Popplewell report? The answer is 1986. The effort which has been made by my right hon. Friends to build support and to carry the football authorities with them has been prolonged and conscientious. It is only because that effort did not yield a voluntary scheme on the lines which Mr. Justice Popplewell recommended that the Bill has been drafted.

I repeat that the Bill is an enabling measure. It has been worked out by my right hon. Friend's working party. The assurances that have been given about implementation are crucial to it. It is in the interests of football supporters —the right hon. Member for Small Heath rightly stressed their importance and their commitment—that there should not remain the gap in protection that the Bill is designed to fill.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising from the statement. The terms of reference of Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry are clearly wide and the timing of the report is indeterminate. It surely follows that the conclusions of such an inquiry could be contrary to the views of House that are taken in pursuit of legislation of which we have just heard. Will you confirm, Mr. Speaker, that in this instance the sub judice rule does not apply? Would not that be the view of most persons with legal training?

Mr. Speaker: I can confirm what the hon. Gentleman says. The sub judice rule does not apply to legislation.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of the inquiry to our greatest spectator sport and to thousands of our constituents, can you assure us that the report will be debated before any recommendations or observations are acted upon?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's words have been heard by those who are responsible.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 4092/1/89 on pesticide residues be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—[*Mr. Maclean.*]

Orders of the Day

Dock Work Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before we debate a highly controversial Bill, may I seek your advice on an issue that raises serious public concern? You will be aware of recent reports about hon. Members having interests outside the House and receiving rather large sums in remuneration for them. Is it acceptable for hon. Members who represent business interests in the docks and who are remunerated for representing those interests to debate the Bill or to vote upon it? Will you give me a clear ruling on that?

Mr. Speaker: That question was asked of me last week. I do not know whether the hon. Lady was present. I confirm that it has always been in order for hon. Members both to speak and to cast their votes on matters of public policy.

Given the late start of the Bill, I propose to limit Back-Bench speeches to 10 minutes between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock. I ask those on the Front Benches and those who may be called before 7 o'clock to bear in mind that constraint.

5.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): I beg to move, That the Bill be read a Second time.

Before I begin my remarks, on the Bill, I associate myself with the words of sympathy from both sides of the House on the preceding statement.

There are a number of ways of stating the case for this Bill. It is possible to set out the glaring but inevitable anomalies in a dock labour scheme which dates back to legislation passed just after the end of the second world war and which was designed to meet the needs of the ports industry in the 1930s and 1940s. It is possible to establish the cost of the scheme which has led to a bill of almost £1 billion for the taxpayer and the ports industry put together, plus the extra costs which the customers of the scheme ports have had to bear. It is possible to describe some of the restrictive practices which have grown up and which have made the ports covered by the dock labour scheme less competitive than they should be.

Those are all strong arguments, and the House should consider them all. They all add to the overwhelming case for the abolition of the scheme, but I believe there is one factor which precedes all that. It is that the abolition of the scheme will ensure a better future for the ports industry in this country and will provide a better future for those working in the industry. What is more, abolition will provide a better future for the areas—often inner-city areas—around the ports themselves.

The fact is that, for all its restrictions, the scheme has provided no security in the docks. Jobs have gone; companies have gone bankrupt; new recruitment of young men has been limited and sometimes non-existent; and long lines of workers have volunteered to leave the industry altogether.

Clearly some of that change—some of that contraction—has been inevitable. Modern technology has meant that fewer dockers have been required. Nevertheless, scheme ports have lost both jobs and trade. Twenty years ago, there were 45,000 registered dock workers. Today there are 9,400. Twenty years ago, scheme ports handled over 90 per cent. of our nation's trade. Today they handle something like 70 per cent.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): In view of the information that the Secretary of State has just given to the House, is it not misleading for Government supporters to go round the country talking about "jobs for life"?

Mr. Fowler: The point about the so-called "jobs for life" is that in no other industry are workers guaranteed a job irrespective of whether there is work to do.

The scheme has created surpluses, and those surpluses have threatened the viability of the ports. The only way to reduce those surpluses has been through voluntary redundancy, which has been massively financed by the taxpayer because the industry could not afford it. That is the essential case and it is a strong and unanswerable case.

It is instructive to compare what has happened in the non-scheme ports. In the main, the reason why those ports are not in the scheme at all is that they were of no consequence for cargo handling in 1947 when the scheme was drawn up. Felixstowe, for example, was, just a wharf. Yet the ports outside the scheme now account for 30 per cent. of our trade in volume and half our trade in value. In addition, their employment of dock workers, has risen to nearly 4,000: nearly one in three of all dockers; and Felixstowe is today one of our leading ports.

Non-scheme ports have gained trade year by year—and with the trade has come investment. In his response to my statement, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made much of the investment at four scheme ports—Tilbury, Bristol, Hull and Newport. Put together it is less than the £54 million committed to investment for 1989 at Felixstowe for the expansion of its container facilities.

Over the past six years, Felixstowe has invested £92 million and Dover has invested almost £85 million. No scheme ports have come near that figure. It is that kind of investment that best ensures competitive ports and preserves jobs.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Even if one accepts what the Secretary of State has said, will he explain why the Bill came as a bolt out of the blue and without any prior knowledge, making it, under this leaky Government, the only piece of legislation that has been kept totally secret until it was sprung across the House of Commons? Would it not have been much better if the Government had proceeded to try to get discussions and agreement between the port employers and the unions? Why has the Secretary of State precipitately decided to bring the Bill forward in this way, instead of taking the path of conciliation and discussion?

Mr. Fowler: I do not think that "precipitately" is exactly the right description for what the Government have done. There has been an evolving consensus about the need to abolish the scheme and to bring forward the legislation. There is no question—there has been no secret—about the review of the barriers to employment that the Government have carried out. I shall come to those points later.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North) *rose*—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not give way.

However, nor has the advance of the ports outside the scheme been achieved either by low pay or by casualism. Dockers are well paid and the enormous changes in the way ships are unloaded—with new technology and with containerisation—has transformed the nature of dock work and virtually eliminated the scope of casual work.

Dock work is now highly skilled specialist work that often requires the use often of sophisticated machinery. It requires a permanent and well trained work force. The days when large numbers of unskilled labourers assembled waiting to see if there was work for them have gone for good—and everyone is glad of that. To underline that point, the employers in the present scheme ports have given an assurance that after abolition there will be no return to casual employment.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not give way.

That assurance is both in my view, important and unprecedented. The reason we have a dock labour scheme is to prevent casualism. Port companies employing 93 per cent. of registered dock workers have now given an undertaking that there will be no return to the casual system of working and the practice in non-scheme ports already demonstrates that this is a bogus fear.

Those who seek to argue that the scheme should be preserved to prevent casualism should have no public credibility. They are using the argument to cloak other reasons for resisting change.

Mr. Parry *rose*——

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: I give way first to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry).

Mr. Parry: Will the Secretary of State give us a categorical assurance that there will not be any casualisation—not even of one job?

Mr. Fowler: I think that I have just repeated the assurance that the employers have given, which is that port companies employing 93 per cent. of registered dock workers have already, in the week after my announcement, given the kind of assurance that the hon. Gentleman is seeking.

That brings me to a fundamental point. The reason why ports covered by the scheme want to see those restrictions go is because they want to be able to compete better with ports outside the scheme and to compete with continental ports that have taken too much of our trade, and to compete in the new position created by 1992 and the single market, and with the railway competition of the Channel tunnel.

Dr. Godman: Will the Secretary of State give way on the point about casualisation?

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not give way at the moment. Let us be clear. Unless those ports succeed in competing, no conceivable dock labour scheme will prevent the relative decline of scheme ports and of employment prospects. As far as I know, there is unanimity among the wide range of port companies covered by the regulations that the dock labour scheme has long since outlived its usefulness and should be ended.

The men urging abolition are often those who have spent their lives in the ports industry, who are committed to the future of that industry, and who want to see a future for those who are now registered dock workers as well as for the other two thirds of the workers who are not in the scheme. It is their judgment that the scheme should go, but it is not just their judgment.

Organisations such as the National Association of Warehouse Keepers have supported the change. It comments:

"Over the last 30 years or more there has been a steady withdrawal of industry from the dock areas because of the restrictions imposed upon it by the Scheme and for a long time no warehouse keeper would willingly have built a warehouse in or near a dock area. All this will now be changed, and the Association regards this as good news."

Respected transport organisations such as the Freight Transport Organisation take the same view. It says of the scheme:

"It has acted as a barrier against investment and progress within the ports industry; undermined the competitiveness of British ports; and added to industry's costs. Rid of this massive millstone, importers and exporters confidently expect the British port industry to provide the efficient and competitive services long enjoyed by their Continental competitors "

With the exception of the *Morning Star*, precious few newspapers—national or regional—believe that the scheme should stay. *The Scotsman* comments:

"Old cargo no longer needed."

The *Glasgow Herald* states: "Decisive action overdue". The *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* comments, "Death of a dinosaur", and the *Hull Daily Mail* states, "Handicap withdrawn". The *Manchester Evening News* comments:

"The time for a change is long overdue."

A whole range of national and regional newspapers have all come out in favour of the scheme being changed.

Most significant of all, very few people outside the Transport and General Workers Union's docks section have been prepared to defend the detail of the scheme. All kinds of arguments have been used, but I have heard very few people on radio or television defending the scheme itself. The Leader of the Opposition most certainly has not done so, and nor has the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

Mr. Ailan Roberts (Bootle): I refer to the Secretary of State's comments concerning lack of investment, of warehouse building and of new industries entering scheme ports. Three weeks ago, the Prime Minister visited Liverpool free port, which is one of the few successful free ports that the Government have announced. The scheme operates there, and there has been massive inward investment. A very successful free port has been established at Liverpool because of the way in which the scheme operates there.

Mr. Fowler: That success is not because of the scheme. The hon. Gentleman is inaccurate in stating that that is the reason why there has been investment at Liverpool or at other scheme ports. While there has been investment at those ports, the industry says with a totally unanimous voice that if the scheme's restrictions go, investment will increase. One has only to examine the situation at non-scheme ports to see that that has happened.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the container terminal in the city of

[Mr. John Townend]

Hull, which is represented by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), is closed? There has been massive investment at that terminal, which has three gantry cranes. At Grimsby, those cranes are operated by 12 men, but at Hull the unions want 23 men, even when there are no ships. What is worse, they not only want to be paid ordinary time but overtime for tea breaks, lunch breaks and even until 6.30 pm when they are not working.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: Perhaps my hon. Friend and other hon. Members representing Hull constituencies would like to conduct their own debate.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townsend) does not represent any part of Hull. When he fought me, the electors threw him out.

Mr. Fowler: I apologise for making that important mistake.

Mr. Townend: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Unlike the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), I was born in Hull.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is not a point of order.

Mr. Fowler: All that leads to my initial conclusion that the debate about Hull should be left to other hon. Members.

The attitude of people in not defending details of the scheme is not surprising, because the scheme suffers from fundamental flaws. First, it creates a statutory monopoly for dock work in 40 of our main ports. That monopoly is enforced by criminal penalties, which is a wholly inappropriate use of the law to limit employment opportunities. Only employers and dockers registered with one of the local dock boards can undertake dock work in ports covered by the scheme. It is a criminal offence punishable by up to three months' imprisonment for anyone to employ without permission anyone who is not a registered dock worker to perform work covered by the scheme. No other industry in this country suffers from those penalties.

Mr. Skinner: There is. Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not.

The effect of that statutory monopoly is to deprive employers in scheme ports of the ability to manage their own work force. It also fosters a belief that the scheme, not the performance of the port, protects jobs.

Secondly, the scheme has bred restrictive practices. If unloading a cargo requires specialist skills that registered dock workers cannot supply, the employer is obliged both to pay specialist staff to undertake the unloading and to pay registered dock workers to stand and watch the work being done. Those practices remain widespread.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Secretary of State give way now?

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not give way again.

Those practices are sustained by the scheme's monopoly, which allows unions to insist on such payments on pain of blocking the loading or unloading of cargo.

Thirdly, as a consequence of attempting to define in statute who should do a particular job, the scheme inevitably suffers from anomalies and bureaucracy. Each scheme port has a complex set of rules about what is, and is not, dock work—which are in effect demarcation lines frozen by statute. The definitions of dock work applied under the scheme date back to the second world war and beyond and take no account of the enormous changes in dock work since then.

The distinction between ports inside and outside the scheme is now quite arbitrary. Southampton is in the scheme; but Portsmouth is not. Liverpool and London are in the scheme but Dover and Folkstone are not. The inexplicable differences in the treatment of the fishing ports of Aberdeen, Peterhead, Grimsby and Hull—and their consequences for business and jobs—reveal the scheme's inadequacies. In Aberdeen, only registered dock workers can handle white fish, while herring and mackerel can be landed by the fishermen themselves.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene on that point.

Nearby Peterhead is outside the scheme and has captured a substantial part of Aberdeen's business. At Grimsby, only registered dock workers can unload fish from boats of more than 60 ft, while in nearby Hull all fish landings are excluded from the scheme—so Hull's fishing port has attracted business away from Grimsby.

The common factor in all those cases is that business and jobs in operations covered by the scheme have been lost to ports free of its restrictions. Those restrictions are at the heart of the stresses and strains that we have seen in recent weeks in Aberdeen and Grimsby.

Mr. Skinner: The Secretary of State refers to the scheme's division of labour and to its restrictive practices, but the same could be said of the legal profession, as to the division of labour between solicitors and barristers. Why is that, when judges took the decision to go on strike today, because of the proposed reforms to the legal system, the Government decided to call off the dogs? If the Secretary of State is so concerned at people having jobs for life, why do the Government not use that argument to abolish the House of Lords?

Mr. Fowler: I started this section of my speech by saying that every conceivable argument has been used except any defence of the dock labour scheme, and the hon. Gentleman has just underlined that point.

The fourth characteristic of the scheme is that it adds to costs. The price of the inefficiencies that it has created has been paid by consumers through the higher costs of goods in the shops; by industry through the price of raw materials and exports; and by the taxpayer through the financial support that successive Governments have given to the port industry, and through Government contributions to voluntary redundancies.

What has the scheme achieved? It has certainly not achieved a secure career for registered dock workers; nor has it achieved good industrial relations, although I have no doubt that the authors of the scheme thought that by

creating a statutory monopoly for dock work and ending the abuses of casual working they would bring about a significant improvement in industrial relations.

There have been major strikes in every decade since the scheme began in 1947. The number of days lost as a result of strikes by registered dock workers in the scheme ports, according to the National Dock Labour Board, is still three times the national average. Between 1985 and 1987, the scheme ports lost 528 man days for every 1,000 employees, compared with a total of 183 in the rest of industry. In the 20 years between 1967 and 1987, there were 3,569 strikes involving registered dock workers, resulting in over 4 million working days being lost in scheme ports. That is a rate of more than three disputes per week.

In his response to my statement the hon. Member for Oldham, West suggested that this was a relatively small scheme covering "only 9,500 workers". Let us be clear what we are talking about: we are talking about the future of the ports now within the scheme, which at present handle 70 per cent. of our national trade. Those who have argued that the scheme should be left to wither simply do not understand the facts. As long as the scheme continues to operate, our great ports such as Liverpool, London and Southampton will remain subject to all its restrictions. There are only two ways for them to escape from the scheme: either Parliament abolishes it or they close down completely. Abolition will ensure that all dock workers, wherever they are employed, will have the same employment rights and obligations as the rest of the working population.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Does the Secretary of State accept that employers now have a responsibility to negotiate with their employees? If they come up with agreed and more generous redundancy terms, will they be included in the legislation? If that is so, a substantial number of people will accept the case that the right hon. Gentleman has made for abolition.

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's support. I do not believe that anyone can negotiate on the scheme itself; that, I think, is a matter for Parliament. Nor do I believe that Ministers wish to prejudice the outcome of any talks taking place tomorrow: that would not be sensible.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, since February 1984, the port employers have made six attempts to discuss the scheme with their employees in the TGWU, and that every such offer has been refused by the union, in defence of the indefensible?

Mr. Fowler: I shall come to that point. If the House will forgive me, I will not give way again; otherwise, my speech will go on far too long for the confines of the debate.

Ending the scheme will not affect either the pay or the pensions of those who are now registered dock workers. Neither is covered by the scheme or comes within the responsibilities of the National Dock Labour Board. Nor should anyone suppose that dock work, whether inside or outside the scheme, is low-paid.

Over the past 40 years—I now come to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed)—there have been countless opportunities for negotiation to reduce the damaging controls imposed by the scheme.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Fowler I am very sorry; I have given way a number of times, and I will not do so again.

Throughout those 40 years the TGWU has shown no sign of willingness even to consider the changes needed to meet the competitive pressures on scheme ports. In 1986 my right hon. Friend the then Transport Secretary, now Secretary of State for the Environment, invited unions and employers to discuss voluntary arrangements to replace the scheme. The national secretary of the TGWU docks group, Mr. Connolly, replied—and he replied very quickly:

"having in mind our position that the Dock Labour Scheme is to remain, I see no point in joint discussions to provide for arrangements which might follow its removal."

In 1987 he was reported by *Lloyd's List* as saying:

"The policy of the Docks and Waterways Group has not changed. There will be opposition to the amendment or revision of the Scheme, and that opposition will take the form of a national dock strike."

The fact is that the TGWU has constantly sought the tightening and extension of the scheme's controls, not their relaxation. It has done so not by negotiation, but by using the power that the scheme's statutory monopoly of dock work gives it to bring scheme ports to a halt with strike action. The Bill aims to bring the scheme to an end quickly but in an orderly fashion, and with continued special provision for dock workers' severance.

Clause 1 repeals the legislation that underpins the scheme, and preserves the board's powers to make provision for the training and welfare of dock workers until its dissolution. Clause 2 requires the board to wind up its affairs quickly but in an orderly manner. It makes provision for the disposal of its assets at less than market vaule, with my permission. The purpose is to provide an incentive for those in the industry who have already paid for the board's activities through levies on their business to take over any training and medical facilities that the industry needs.

Clause 3 allows the board to be replaced if it fails to comply with its duties. Clause 4 writes off all the board's outstanding liabilities for loans that it has received from Government, and provides for its running costs. Clause 5 provides for any registered dock worker who becomes redundant within three years of the ending of the scheme to receive redundancy payments on a considerably more generous scale than those which are open to most other employees.

After only 15 years' service, dock workers will be eligible for redundancy payments of £35,000 if they lose their jobs in the 18 months after the scheme is abolished —that is, until early 1991—and payment of £20,000 if they lose their jobs in the subsequent 18 months. The cost of the payments will be shared equally between the Government and the individual employer concerned. The detailed arrangements will be set out in draft regulations to be tabled shortly, and will be available to the Standing Committee.

Clause 6 extends provisions of the Employment Protection Act 1978 to those who were registered dock workers immediately before Royal Assent. That means that registered dockers will acquire individual rights not to

[Mr. Fowler]

be unfairly dismissed, for example, and to receive written particulars of their terms of employment, which the scheme denied to them.

This is a statutory scheme. It was brought into existence by Parliament, and Parliament is the proper place for decisions about its future; there should be no attempt to usurp that role. I do not believe that there will be any public support for strike action that is directed towards retaining the provisions of the scheme.

Furthermore, I believe that the House will want to hear that clearly and unequivocally stated by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. His latest statements suggest that he now has doubts about industrial action, but I have to point out that, when the hon. Gentleman spoke to a meeting of the national ports shop stewards committee in London at the end of January, he had an entirely different message. According to *International Freighting Weekly* of 7 February 1989 and a similar report in the *Morning Star* of 30 January 1989, he gave the same message. I shall quote from *International Freighting Weekly*. The hon. Gentleman said:

"An all-out strike by Britain's dockers in defence of their dock labour scheme would have the full backing of the Labour Party."

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): If the right hon. Gentleman had bothered to check with me as to whether such press reports were accurate, I could have told him—I have here a copy of the speech that I made on that day—that I made no such statement, or anything like it.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Fowler: The same statement was reported also in the *Morning Star:* the hon. Gentleman

"pledged his party's full support in any fight to defend the scheme."

I imagine that that statement is also withdrawn. I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman has said. We have now made substantial progress. If I am wrong, I shall gladly withdraw what I have said.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Fowler: Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow my to continue.

I hope that the hon. Member for Oldham, West will listen to what I have to say. The House will expect him to make clear his views on industrial action. I take it, from what the hon. Gentleman has just said, that he is opposed to industrial action to seek to preserve the dock labour scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not give way—not even to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), and certainly not to the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts).

The hon. Member for Oldham, West made a statement about what was reported to be his attitude. He now refuses to make any statement about his view on future industrial action. If he intends to make that clear in his speech, the House will listen to it with interest. He will also have to say whether it is Labour party policy to restore the national dock labour scheme. Few people would understand industrial action, and even less the hon. Gentleman's backing of strike action for a scheme that the Labour party would not restore, even if it were to form a future Government. Those fundamental questions must be addressed in the debate.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Before my right hon. Friend leaves the labour party's attitude, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has just said that he made no such statement about a strike. I have the transcript of "BBC Lancashire News'" of 10 April 1989. After being asked about whether there would be a strike, the hon. Member for Oldham, West said:

"then frankly we have no alternative but to support, if there were a strike."

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Member for Oldham, West has a great deal of explaining to do. The hon. Gentleman characteristically says to audiences what they want to hear from him. We shall want to hear tonight what precisely is his attitude, and that of his party, towards a strike.

The first dock labour scheme was approved by this House in 1947—over 40 years ago. At that time the ports covered by the scheme accounted for virtually all our trade and employed 80,000 dock workers. The work they did was labour-intensive and at best semi-skilled.

The position today is radically different. Dock work has been transformed. It is now capital-intensive and it requires a permanent labour force with the skills to operate sophisticated equipment. There are now 140 employers providing jobs in dock work in the scheme ports, compared with over 1,500 in the 1950s. Fewer than 14,000 dock workers are now employed in all our ports, of whom 9,000 are in scheme ports. It is only improved output, taking advantage of new technology, which will guarantee continuing good pay and conditions for all port workers. The dock labour scheme can provide no such guarantee. On the contrary, the scheme ports have increasingly lost ground to the ports outside the scheme.

The Government are now asking Parliament to bring the dock labour scheme to an end in 1989. It has manifestly become irrelevant to the needs of a modern port industry and it is manifestly damaging the efficiency of the scheme ports. In 1947, Parliament created the statutory monopoly in our scheme ports. Only Parliament can end the statutory monopoly of dock work and abolish the dock labour scheme.

The Bill is vital to the future of our ports industry. More than that, it will remove a major barrier to the expansion of business and employment in this country. I believe that this measure is in the best interests of the ports now covered by the scheme, that it is in the best interests of port areas where development is now being constricted and, above all, that it is in the best interests of all the people working in the ports industry.

5.46 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Despite the long diatribe to which we have just been treated by the Secretary of State on the dock labour scheme, the Bill has a great deal more to do with political diversion for the Government than with what is happening in the docks. There has been no unrest in the docks for several years.

Productivity in scheme ports has been bounding ahead, as it has in non-scheme ports. There was no mention of abolition of the scheme in the Tory party's 1987 election manifesto.

The Government are slipping fast in the polls. All their main policies—for the National Health Service, for the poll tax and for water privatisation—are deeply unpopular and they are in desperate need of a scapegoat to provide an alibi for the continuing series of unprecedented trade deficits and the likely run on the pound that the Chancellor's bungling is expected soon to bring about.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, not for the moment.

That is not just my view. It was confirmed by Tory Members of Parliament on 12 October 1988—more than six months ago. The Channel 4 programme "Dispatches" broadcast a documentary entitled "Trouble on the Waterfront", which discussed the dock labour scheme at length. During the programme the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)—one of the leaders of the Tory Back-Bench campaign for abolition—said:

"I think we could well have a sudden announcement rather than a preview in the Queen's Speech."

The programme presenter then immediately spelt out what was meant.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall give way in a moment. The hon. Gentleman need not be so anxious.

The programme presenter then made perfectly clear what was meant by those words. He said:

"Saving it"—

that is, abolition—

"for a politically rainy day is the third option. Tory MPs and industry sources have suggested to Dispatches that should the Government get into serious difficulties, e.g. over the balance of payments, then they would use the repeal of the Scheme to rally their supporters and public opinion against the unions."

Mr. Arnold: Would not the hon. Gentleman agree that I was right on both counts? The proposal was previewed in the Queen's Speech in the words, "Other measures will be laid before you". It has now been well presented, and bang on time.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has let the cat out of the bag. He was exactly right. He is one of those who were in the know about it. He knew about the long-term contingency planning taking place in the past 18 months. A Channel 4 programme six months ago blew the Government's cover on the introduction of this Bill as revealingly as the Ridley plan did for the miners' strike. Both documents exposed the Government's long-term plan to use industrial provocation for political ends.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that the Government have introduced the Bill to improve their electoral chances. That must mean that the proposals are popular with the electorate. If people like the Bill, why does the Labour party act against their wishes?

Mr. Meacher: If the matter is so politically popular, why did not the Government include it in their manifesto in 1987? I use the words "gratuitous industrial provocation" because it is instructive to compare the ways in which the Government seek to bring about radical changes in three different areas. In the case of the legal profession, we had three Green Papers and a gentlemanly debate in the other place. [HON. MEMBERS: "Gentlemanly?"] It may not have been so gentlemanly, but at least it was a debate. The Lord Chancellor has been taking notes and listening attentively to all his critics and we now read in the press that the Government are having second thoughts about such matters as the licensing of advocates and possibly on contingency fees. When 100 High Court judges are so incensed by the Government's proposals that they threaten to take industrial action to disrupt the courts, they are given a ticking-off behind the scenes but publicly they are politely offered a four-month extension to the consultation period.

What a contrast we have with the dockers. In their case, there is no consultation whatever. They are abruptly handed down a White Paper and—this is without precedent in my experience—a Bill is introduced the very next day. No doubt the proceedings on this Bill will be more telescoped than the proceedings on any major Bill this Session. Under the present Government, there is one law for the professions and another for working people. For the lawyers, we have change by consent—for the dockers, change by compulsion.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Does the hon. Gentleman think that a dock strike should be called, and if one is called, will the Labour party support it? Would a future Labour Government bring in legislation to reintroduce the scheme? Would they activate the scheme as it would have been activated under the Dock Work Regulation Act 1976?

Mr. Meacher: The only people who want a dock strike are the Government. I do not believe that the employers want a dock strike and we know that the dock workers do not want a dock strike. If there is a strike, it will have been caused wholly by the Government's gratuitous provocation. I unreservedly condemn that provocation which places responsibility for whatever transpires squarely on the shoulders of the Government.

Mr. Fowler: Does the hon. Gentleman propose to return to the point about industrial action, or is that all that he has to say about it? That is an important point for the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Does the Minister want a dock strike?"] The whole House will want to hear the hon. Member for Oldham, West condemn industrial action. I condemn industrial action. Does he?

Mr. Meacher: For one who made no attempt whatever to discuss the matter with those directly involved, the Secretary of State is suddenly becoming remarkably interested in consultation. He should have consulted the right people at the right time—that is to say, earlier.

Let us consider the Government's current struggle with the doctors about the National Health Service proposals. A week ago at Question Time we heard the Prime Minister say of the proposals:

"They are not meant to be a specific blueprint and we will, of course, consider representations."—[*Official Report*, 11 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 737.]

How different that is from her treatment of the dockers.

I noted that the Secretary of State said that the role of this House should not be disrupted and that this was a matter for Parliament. He said that he did not want to prejudice the talks which are to take place tomorrow. If the dockers and their leaders make representations to the

[Mr. Meacher]

Government on enforceable guarantees to prevent a return to casualisation and on other matters, will the Government consider those representations?

Mr. Fowler: The whole of the dock labour scheme should be debated. The proposition is before the House, and the decision is for both Houses of Parliament. There will be a Committee stage, during which we can go through the Bill in detail. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Oldham, West asked me a question. Precisely the same parliamentary procedure has been adopted as was adopted when the scheme was first implemented. The House still wants to know whether the hon. Gentleman backs industrial action.

Mr. Meacher: Can the right hon. Gentleman give one other instance in which the Government have brought forward legislation affecting an entire industry and not consulted the people in that industry or their representatives?

Mr. Fowler: Can the hon. Gentleman give one instance when the Transport and General Workers Union has not made it absolutely clear that it is not prepared to negotiate in any way, shape or form? That has been its attitude.

Mr. Meacher: If the right hon. Gentleman believes that, he is quite wrong. I am sure that the leaders of the TGWU would be perfectly prepared to enter discussions with him about the future of the industry and the dock labour scheme. Am I to understand from the right hon. Gentleman's previous answer that he is agreeing to that?

Mr. Fowler: I am most certainly not agreeing to that. The provisions have been on the statute book for 40 years. There has been one opportunity after another for the TGWU to seek reform and change, but on every occasion it has refused.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman has made crystal clear his unwillingness to enter into discussions because the Government are hell bent on a strike. The right hon. Gentleman has the opportunity to prevent a strike by entering into negotiations with leaders of the dock workers and the TGWU. I am convinced that the strike could then be avoided and we could have a negotiated settlement on the future of the industry. Will the right hon. Gentleman do that?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman keeps accusing me of being hell bent on a strike. That is totally untrue. The hon. Gentleman continues to wriggle and refuses to denounce industrial action. The time has come for him to stand up and denounce industrial action.

Mr. Meacher: I have said that we certainly do not want a strike. We want a negotiated settlement. The right hon. Gentleman can deliver a negotiated settlement. All that he has to do is to say at the Dispatch Box today that he is prepared to enter into negotiations. The fact that he is not prepared to make that statement will make it absolutely clear to everyone in Britain that if there is a strike, he and his Government will be the cause of it. *[Interruption.]*

I am well aware of the Government's claim, which the Secretary of State repeated, that there has been ample negotiations by the employers about the scheme. I realise how the Government reached that conclusion, because the Government's view of negotiations is, "I talk to you about an issue, and you agree with the decision that I have already made." That is their view, but the relevant national joint council minutes stretching back over the past seven years do not bear out the claims made by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister.

The NJC minutes of March 1982 spell out the agreed proposal to set up a joint seminar on the future of the industry. Crucially, the minutes state:

"it was noted the the Working Party did not intend that the Dock Labour Scheme should dominate the discussions".

In other words, the joint discussion between the two sides over the next three years was not, and was not intended to be, primarily about the dock labour scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I will finish this point and then give way.

It is also perfectly clear from the minutes that the trade union side repeatedly stressed that it was ready to enter joint discussions on the future of the industry. It made that clear in March 1982, August 1982, December 1983, February 1984 and March 1986. I will give the House just one example. The minutes of December 1983 state:

"the workpeople indicated that they were prepared to enter into a joint discussion on the future of the industry within the NJC Executive Committee".

They continue:

"they also considered that at the same time as any joint industry discussions, there should be contact with Government Departments to establish the Government's view of the ports Industry's future as part of a total transport policy."

Mr. Prescott: The scheme is part of ports policy.

Mr. Meacher: It is all part of the same thing.

In March 1986, after the conclusion of the seminar on the future of the industry, the minutes state that "Mr. Connolly", the joint secretary on the trade union side,

"recalled that when the Workpeople's Side had wanted to start a dialogue on the future of the industry with a view to a joint approach to the Government, the Employers' Side had declined to do so".

It is perfectly clear that the trade union side has at no stage been unwilling to enter into discussions, and the employers' side has blocked a joint submission to the Government. As it is a matter of critical importance for the next few days, in view of what I have read out, I repeat my question to the Secretary of State. Will he consider representations made to him by the trade union side which in the past it has been prevented from making jointly? Will he consider those representations?

Mr. Fowler: I should like to know why Mr. Connolly said on 24 February 1987, as reported in *Lloyd's List*:

"The policy of the Docks and Waterways group has not changed. There will be opposition to the amendment or revision of the scheme, and that opposition will take the form of a national dock strike".

That is what Mr. Connolly said. He has never denied that he said it and he set out the position most clearly.

Mr. Meacher: There is a very simple way of resolving the dispute. Mr. Connolly and the docks section of the TGWU are ready to discuss the matter with the Government, but the Secretary of State will not do so. The simple way to resolve the matter is to ask Mr. Connolly. Will the Secretary of State ask Mr. Connolly to negotiate?

Mr. Fowler: I shall not. There is now legislation before the House. I remind the hon. Gentleman that in 1986 the Secretary of State for Transport asked Mr. Connolly to negotiate but he totally refused.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman is making terribly heavy weather of this. Instead of relying on *Lloyd's List* for a telegraphic service, why does he not have the guts to invite Mr. Connolly to meet him face to face and to ask him?

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Gentleman just read out the minutes of the NJC of 19 March 1986 and quoted what Mr. Connolly said. He stopped at the words,

"the Employers' side had declined to do so.".

Why did the hon. Gentleman not read out the rest of what Mr. Connolly said? The minutes continued:

"He doubted however whether the employers wanted that kind of discussion, and suggested that they wished instead to talk about abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme. He said that the trade union were not prepared to discuss abolition of the Scheme."

Mr. Meacher: Absolutely. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) might like to listen to my answer instead of laughing like a hyena. It has always been the union's position that it would not discuss abolition independently of a discussion about the future of an integral ports policy. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should understand that there are two genuinely different views between the employers and— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman merely giggles aimlessly because he does not have the slightest interest in the argument.

The employers simply want to bring about the end of the dock labour scheme. The union's position has always been that it will discuss changes, modifications and improvements in the scheme within the context of a total ports policy. There is nothing remarkable about what Mr. Connolly said. One might have expected that a Secretary of State in a constructive Government not hellbent on confrontation—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend. We are talking about the future of families throughout the country, but the conduct of Conservative Members is worse than anything I have ever seen in the House. If only out of respect for those who will be affected by the legislation, can you make them show some decency towards those families throughout the country?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I regret that there is an excessive amount of sedentary noise from both sides of the House. I hope that we can continue our business in a more orderly fashion.

Mr. Meacher: One might have expected that a Government faced with genuinely incompatible views between employers and trade unions with regard to the future of an industry would set up a committee of inquiry or some similar body in order to assess objectively the submissions from both sides and to make recommendations. It is deeply deplorable that the Government have done the exact opposite and sought to establish a fait accompli in the most partisan possible manner.

I can understand why the Secretary of State is so reluctant to set up an objective committee of inquiry. The last time he did so, it backfired in his face. Spurred on by the Prime Minister's denunciation of the film and television industry as the last bastion of restrictive practices, he set up an inquiry which reported last week. The right hon. Gentleman must be desperately embarrassed about this, or he ought to be if he is not completely brass-necked. The Government's committee concluded that the labour practices in the industry were not against the public interest. Indeed, it went further and defended the closed shop on the grounds that it helped to regulate a casual labour market and provided a badge of skills competence.

The docks industry is not a closed shop, but both those arguments apply strongly to it, so it is no surprise that the Secretary of State and his Cabinet colleagues are unwilling to set up an independent public inquiry into the future regulation of the docks industry. They are afraid of what the conclusions might be.

I should make it clear that Parliament ought not to pass the Bill unless and until five central issues concerning the operation of the dock labour scheme are satisfactorily resolved. The Secretary of State in his speech today was so busy knocking the scheme that he scarcely bothered to acknowledge these issues, let alone resolve them. I beg him to believe that there is genuine and deep anxiety that the abolition of the scheme will lead to the return of casualisation in the industry. Naturally, the employers have put out a press release to say that that will not be so, but lest anyone is taken in by that press release—clearly the Secretary of State has swallowed it hook, line and sinker—I remind the House that that was exactly what the employers said in 1970 at the time of Devlin II. They stated that they had no intention of returning to casual labour and that every man would be allocated permanent employment, but within 18 months, following the collapse of two companies—Southern Stevedores and Thames 65—they tried to reintroduce the casual system by returning the men to the temporary unattached register. The Secretary of State may screw up his face, but that is what happened.

The employers' assurances on previous occasions were clearly groundless and there is no reason to doubt that history is about to repeat itself. Anyone who doubts that need only consider the words of one major port employer—Mr. Peter de Savary—who has just announced plans to bring back casual labour on his new terminal on the Isle of Grain.

On a Channel 4 programme—I quote from the transcript—he said:

"There will be a combination of permanent dockworkers and casual dockworkers. That's a necessity of the industry."

There can be no clearer signal that the employers expect and intend, in an industry where traffic constantly fluctuates, to reduce to a core labour force and employ the remainder on a casual basis. In Liverpool and south Wales, there have been recent attempts to do exactly that.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I had hoped to speak later and to remind the hon. Gentleman that he referred to this matter in a speech after my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that we intended to abolish the scheme. The managing director of Highland Participants, the company which will run Mr. de Savary's project, said that it would not be possible to run a container port of the type it has in mind using casual labour. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is trying to frighten dockers.

Mr. Meacher: I can see the problem facing Conservative Members. However, the person in control of the project is the employer, Mr. Peter de Savary. I am afraid that I accept his view of what is likely to happen rather than that of a manager.

Mr. Fowler: Geoffrey Parker, the managing director to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) referred, has given a clear assurance that that is not the case. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West understands, Mr. Geoffrey Parker is an experienced ports figure and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept his assurance.

Mr. Meacher: If that is so, why did Mr. de Savary make those remarks and why has he not withdrawn them on the advice of his manager? If I can be told the reasons for that, I may give a little more credence to the hope and a prayer being offered by the Secretary of State.

Dr. Godman: Casual dock work has already returned to the lower Clyde. I received a communication from the chairman of the docks branch in Greenock which said, among other things, that a shipping company which has recently moved to Port Glasgow has

"hired a third party to take on dock labourers on what ranges from a casual to a buckshee basis."

By the words "buckshee basis" Mr. Cannie, the chairman of the docks committee, means that the so-called shipping company is paying backhanders to men on the dole who are desperate for work of any sort. Therefore, we on the lower Clyde have experienced the return of casual dock work.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend has made a relevant reference. We know that there is already in the non-scheme ports casualisation at a level of about 5 per cent. or 6 per cent. The key point is that it will gradually seep in because of the fluctuations and oscillations in docks traffic. That is precisely the problem. Because of the forces of competition on which the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are always so keen, we shall be told by other employers, "We would like to provide full work but it is not possible because we are being undercut by other employers." That is precisely what we expect to happen. The press releases issued by 93 per cent. of the employers in the National Association of Port Employers are worthless compared with those economic forces.

I want to say something about the genuine disputes over hiring and firing. The employers complain that it is a "jobs for life" scheme. We have heard that so many times. That can hardly be the case when there has been a cut of 47,000 in the number of registered dock workers in the past 15 years—a reduction of 80 per cent. Dockers can be sacked and are sacked for justifiable reasons such as misconduct. Registered dockers have a right not to be dismissed without cause and when most of them have worked in the industry for 15 years or more, they have a right not to be made redundant without entitlement to severance payment.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I have given way enough and I must make progress, because time is moving on.

Bearing in mind—the Secretary of State referred to this—the oscillations and the peaks and troughs in traffic, there is a small measure of surplus labour which in 1987 was 9·5 per cent. However, the point to be remembered is that, under the system of casualisation before the scheme there was an average labour surplus per year of 31 per cent. That shows the improvement that has been made under the scheme.

Employers have made the surplus bigger than it should be. In the past few weeks, Associated British Ports sought to employ 50 casual, non-registered dock workers at the port of Barry, while it reported a surplus of 40 in Cardiff, which is only six miles away and has a facility for daily transfers. If employers behave in such a way, of course there will be a surplus of labour.

There has been a huge propaganda barrage against the scheme and allegations of restrictive practices. We do not condone cases which have no industrial logic and which are often the result of slack management. That is why we stated in our transport policy document in early 1987, before the last election,

"We shall review the operation of the Dock Labour Scheme."

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Labour party's election manifesto. Let us suppose that the Labour party forms the next Government. Would a Labour Government review this legislation?

Mr. Meacher: We shall do what the Government are so reluctant to do—get port employers and the union around a table and regulate the industry as is necessary in the circumstances.

The truth is that many of the restrictive practices that were criticised in the White Paper result from the long-term and acute skill shortages that have been caused by employers' reluctance to train registered dock workers. Standby arrangements—so-called "ghosting"—have rightly been widely condemned, but employers preferred those arrangements to training dock workers. Those same employers are using the arrangements to blame the union for costly restrictive practices.

The Government and employers have cited—the Secretary of State mentioned this when he announced the White Paper—welting or bobbing, which means being paid when one is not at work. The incidence of this is relatively rare, but where it occurs it can and should be dealt with under the dock labour scheme disciplinary procedures. *[Laughter.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but perhaps the problem is the weak and feeble management of ports. There is no need to get rid of the dock labour scheme to get rid of such practices.

Objection is made to dockers' guaranteed minimum daily pay, but many people receive such pay. Doctors do not lose their pay if patients do not turn up. Duty solicitors who are on standby over the weekend are paid even if their services are not needed. High Court judges are paid for the 10 or 12 weeks outside term when they are not trying cases. If dockers do not have the same right, we shall return to casualisation, which perhaps is what many objectors want.

Despite all the talk about restrictive practices, productivity in scheme ports has been exceptionally high.

Mr. John Townend: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I will not give way.

There has been a 730 per cent. increase in productivity in terms of added volume per worker in 20 years. Few industries can match that record.

A further complaint made by employers against the scheme—the Secretary of State made special reference to this—is that it has driven port investment and jobs elsewhere. Major investments have been announced for scheme ports such as Immingham, Southampton, Bristol and London. I note from the annual report of Associated British Ports that there is major current or planned investment at King's Lynn, Goole, Hull, Ayr and Swansea. Investment is being made at Newport and Tilbury in new berths and terminals to the value of £8 million to £10 million. Of course there has been rapid growth in the non-scheme east coast ports, but that primarily reflects major changes in cargo handling techniques and the shift in trade to Europe. For exactly those reasons, other schemes on the east coast, such as Ipswich, have grown fast.

Mr. Townend *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I will not give way.

The White Paper—the most propagandist and partisan that I have read for many a year—claims that 50,000 jobs could be created if the scheme were abolished. That is simply repeating the conclusion of a paper prepared for port employers by an organisation called WEFA. The quality of work in the paper is laughable. The estimate of 4,200 new jobs for dockers is based on nothing more than an assertion by employers. Not surprisingly, the report has been described as

"an exposition of the prejudices of the port employers with a bit of maths thrown in"

to give it scientific validity. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who by?"] It is an excellent description, is it not? [HON. MEMBERS: "Who by?"] I describe it like that, and I am happy to do so because that is exactly what it is. It is not my description, but that of another body. *[Interruption.]* It may be *Lloyd's List*. It is disreputable for a tendentious and virtually worthless report to have its conclusions reproduced without qualification in a White Paper.

Another charge made against the scheme is that it increases costs, but employers do not say that its administrative costs are negligible. Of the £7 to £15 per tonne charged in scheme ports for cargo handling, precisely 1·5p can be attributed to the scheme's administration. The levy pays for the medical and welfare amenities that most decent employers should provide. The biggest cost is voluntary severance arrangements, which are recouped later in higher productivity, and the Government meet half the redundancy costs.

More important, employers do not say—because of their obsession with vilifying the scheme—that a much bigger part of the extra costs that they have to bear compared with their European counterparts arises from charges levied by the Government, including lighthouse dues, pilotage and Customs charges. Employers recently estimated that lighthouse dues alone could amount to £20,000 per call for a large vessel and well over £1 million per year for a single line. The Department of Transport estimated that they accounted for one seventh of the adverse cost differential between British and continental ports. As if that were not bad enough, in 1987 the Government announced a 14 per cent. increase in light dues and sought to raise a further £1 million a year by levying light dues on fishing vessels of a certain size.

Those Government-imposed charges, which employers have described as a "real and dominant deterrent" to ship-owners, have caused the substantial loss of trade in British ports. If the Government are genuinely concerned about freeing our ports for 1992 and the Channel tunnel link, why do they not remove that major cause of excessive handling costs? In European ports such as Rotterdam and Antwerp, such services are provided free.

The central point is not that other European countries do not have a dock labour scheme and we do, but that they have a national plan for the development of their port industry and we do not. Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium have a dock labour scheme which provides for the direct involvement of a trade union and dock workers in recruitment, training, welfare, medical services and redundancy.

The difference arises in two vital respects. First, competitor countries value their ports as part of their basic national infrastructure and therefore give them heavy Government support. Every coastal EC state on the continent—with the single exception of Denmark—provides either 100 per cent. or near—100 per cent. subsidies for port investment in and maintenance of maritime access channels, lights, buoys, navigational aids, sea locks, exterior breakwaters, docks, quays and reclaimed land. Britain is the only country which provides none of those aids. A spokesman for Associated British Ports recently confirmed that that, and not the labour scheme, is the reason for the considerable cost disadvantage faced by British ports.

Secondly, unlike Governments in countries across the North sea and the Channel, the British Government have no national plan for port development. For example, on the Humber there are dozens of small ports. The area can already handle 20 per cent. more trade than it has ever had, yet new ports are being built and there are plans to build many more. A similar story of duplication, confusion and petty proliferation exists in other parts of the country. By comparison, the European ports, which the Government cite in the White Paper as being efficient, are massive because their Governments have a deliberate policy of concentrating on major ports to gain the maximum benefits from economies of scale. For that reason, Rotterdam handles nearly 40 million tonnes—50 per cent. more than London and three times more than our next three largest ports, including Felixstowe.

The Government's view was set out by Lord Brabazon, the Minister for shipping, on a Channel 4 programme. His remarks are worth quoting verbatim. He said:

"We have a free market policy. Market forces prevail. We believe the market is best to decide where new investment should go and which ports should be used by the ship-owners."

He then added the immortal words:

"The policy is, as such, there is no policy."

That just about sums up the Government policy. That is why, in the run-up to 1992, we have been overtaken by so many European ports.

The Bill involves just one proposal—the abolition of the scheme—but abolition is no panacea. Far more fundamental problems, on which the Government are completely empty-handed, need to be resolved, including the lack of a national ports policy, planned investment or positive industrial relations. The Bill is the product of confrontation ideology and political opportunism. That is why it offers no answers for the future of the docks industry.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has already said that speeches delivered between 7 and 9 o'clock will be limited by the 10-minute rule. I hope that those who speak between now and 7 o'clock will bear in mind the constraints upon their colleagues.

6.32 pm

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) seeks to defend the indefensible. He has not done a very good job of it today. It is intriguing that he has backtracked on the statement which he made only one week ago, that the Labour party would support a national dock strike, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) pointed out—and the hon. Member for Oldham, West was unable to deny. On BBC Radio Lancashire news, a week ago this evening, the interviewer, Mike West, said:

"The Labour party have made it clear it would support dockers if they decided to take strike action over the Government's decision. Shadow Employment spokesman Michael Meacher says the Government were taking a reckless gamble, and the Labour party would have to stand by the dockers."

The right hon. Member for Oldham, West replied:

"frankly we have no alternative but to support, if there were a strike."

Clearly, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West has attempted to backtrack on that statement. So, too, has his leader.

On the same evening of 10 April, the Leader of the Opposition, interviewed by David Walter on BBC television's "Newsnight" programme, said:

"If it is necessary . . . for us to declare our solidarity for dock workers in their efforts to sustain operations and to maintain the continuity of dock working, then the Labour party won't be found wanting."

Will the Secretary of State tell us whether the Labour party will be found wanting yes or no? Will the Labour party back such a strike, as the right hon. Gentleman said just a week ago? *[Interruption.]* I give way to him—*[Interruption.]* My apologies—I meant the shadow Secretary of State. I see that he does not wish to intervene—instead I give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway).

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Does not the hon. Gentleman understand the simple point that, if there is a dock strike, the Opposition will feel it necessary to support the workers? However, we do not want a strike. Given his famous name, would not the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) accept that it would be better to get round a table and have some jaw-jaw, rather than war-war with the dockers?

Mr. Churchill: I see no reason why there should be any war-war. I am delighted that the Shadow Secretary of State has thought better of his earlier intemperate and reckless commitment.

Mr. Alan Roberts *rose*——

Mr. Churchill: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a minute.

Significantly, the hon. Member for Oldham, West refused to give a straight reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), who asked whether the right hon. Gentleman would pledge the Labour party—if it were ever again elected to government—to reintroduce the dock labour scheme. The fact that the hon. Gentleman has failed to answer that question is significant because it meant that the dock labour scheme—even in the Labour party's eyes—is now a dead duck.

Mr. Leigh: Does my hon. Friend also recall that the Shadow Secretary of State refused to answer my four questions—including one in particular? I asked whether, if there were a Labour Government, they would activate the dock labour scheme, as Lord Callaghan's Government wanted to do. Such an activation would bring many other industries into the scheme—including those miles from the coast—and result in many industries not wishing to set up in scheme areas. The effect of the scheme on employment is worrying and it is that upon which we should focus our debate.

Mr. Churchill: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am conscious of your request for brief speeches, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I wish to confine my remarks principally to the port of Manchester.

Mr. Allan Roberts: There is not a port of Manchester.

Mr. Churchill: The hon. Gentleman says that there is no port of Manchester. A significant part of the reason for that is the dock labour scheme. In its heyday, the port of Manchester employed nearly 10,000 people—including 3,500 registered dockers. In 1965, the port of Manchester moved 16 million tonnes, which represented 5 per cent. of the nation's imports and exports. By 1987, that figure had slipped to below 10 million tonnes, less than 2 per cent.

The demise of the port of Manchester was, above all, due to two factors. The first was technological evolution—specifically, containerisation and the move to larger vessels. But secondly, there is no question but that restrictive practices and endless unofficial strikes and the dock labour scheme—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) thinks it funny to destroy jobs by endless unofficial strikes and restrictive practices. Those factors played a key part in the demise of the port of Manchester.

Operations at the port of Manchester, which was a scheme port, were plagued by inter-union squabbles between the Transport and General Workers Union, known as the white union, and the stevedores' union, known as the blue union.

The TGWU would not allow employers to negotiate with the blues and neither union could control its members. The Opposition Chief Whip is well aware of the problem—he has similar difficulty controlling his hon. Friends.

It took just one militant on a bicycle to go around Manchester docks with a bull horn yelling, "Everybody out," for everyone to down tools. Disputes and unofficial strikes were endless, and ultimately customers and operators went elsewhere—to Felixstowe and the continental ports. This was one of the principal reasons why, in 1982, Manchester Liners, a key part of the operations into the port of Manchester, abandoned its home port and went elsewhere.

After 80 years of operation between 1898 and 1979, the port of Manchester virtually ceased to handle general cargoes. The dock labour scheme acted as a barrier between employers and employees. Its aim, laudable in its time, was to provide regular employment, but it has long since outlived its necessity. Today it is an anachronism.

The Secretary of State has today assured the House that there will be no return to casual labour in the docks—an important assurance.

The dock labour board proved utterly incapable of resolving the many disputes that arose in the port of Manchester and other scheme ports throughout the country. This inability was inherent in the board's make-up: The chairman might be a Socialist and his deputy a Conservative. Unions and employers took turn and turn about to occupy different positions on the board. Its constitution almost guaranteed that there was no means of resolving any impasse that might crop up.

Today, the only cargoes going into Manchester by sea and ship canal are oil and chemicals, apart from grain to Cerestar in Trafford Park and a little scrap metal and lumber. There are no general cargoes any more, and there is no question but that the dock labour scheme played a significant part in the demise of the port.

The port of Manchester is now coming alive, but not as a port. It is coming alive with the transformation of the Salford docks into upmarket housing and of Trafford wharf into a series of significant high-tech industrial developments. As long as the scheme existed, the port had no future.

It is no coincidence that the non-scheme ports have thrived, while the scheme ports have declined in relative or even absolute terms. The Opposition have accused the Government of bringing forward this measure precipitately. This is nonsense. If anything, the Government have been too dilatory about scrapping the outdated dock labour scheme. Its abolition is long overdue. I warmly welcome this measure and the generous severance terms for any dockers who will lose their jobs within 18 months. This is a fair and necessary measure, and I wish it well.

6.44 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): One does not have to search far to discover the real reason why the Government have introduced this Bill, callously and cynically, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said. They have made no effort to debate the subject in the House and given the unions no opportunity to discuss it with the employers. They are rushing through the Bill as quickly as possible.

Everyone who knows the industry is aware of the Government's reasons for abolishing the scheme. When discussing why the scheme existed, Minsiters have in the past accused me of being out of date and living in the 18th or 19th centuries. When the national dock labour scheme was introduced in 1947 it had to be forced on the employers, who were unwilling to change the industry from what it then was—an industry of hyper-exploitation and low pay which imposed misery on those who worked in it and ignored the conditions in which they worked. The Government tell us, by implication, that employers do not act like that today, but I am afraid that I do not trust them. I do not trust any employer who wants to remove the rights—not the privileges—that have been achieved by dock workers over generations to enable them to stand against and remove the excesses of ruthless employers.

It is not only the dock workers who are affected. Many books have been written about the poverty of the dock areas, which affected the women and children in dock workers' families, too. Anyone who has read these books will understand why intervention of the sort enacted in 1947 was needed. It was possible, right up to the 1950s and beyond, for employers to come into the port industry by putting a wooden hut on the quay and bringing with them three or four wire strops—and they had a business. They were responsible and accountable to no one. If the Secretary of State would listen to me he might learn something. He has clearly shown today that he knows nothing about the docks industry, except what he has heard in the Goebbels-like propaganda that keeps being repeated about bobbing and ghosting and restrictive practices. In many cases these practices are to do with rights that have been negotiated with employers, who are being allowed to hide behind the Government's skirts.

The employers and those who represent the Conservative party never wanted the scheme in the first place. It gave workers rights that they wanted to deny them. One of the aspects of the scheme that really hurt the Conservative party and the employers was that for the first time in the history of industrial relations in this country a degree—only a degree—of democracy was introduced to the business of hiring and firing. The Conservative party and its backers outside will not tolerate giving workers a say in determining whether their employers have been justified in sacking them. This has nothing to do with casualisation or decasualisation. It is part of the Government's continued and relentless attack since 1979 upon the trade union movement. That attack was designed to weaken the movement so that it could not respond to the ruthless nature of some employers.

All the signs are that the employers are taking great advantage of the Government's policies on industrial relations. That is the central issue. It has been argued that the dockers have been resistant to change. I am long enough in the tooth to have gone to the docks in 1946 after spending eight years at sea, including the war. At that time the docker's only equipment was a hook in his belt and he picked up a hand bogey when he went into the dock. The dockers did not decide on that method of work.

At that time labour was cheap and there was plenty of it. Sometimes men went to the docks for work and were sent home for three days or a week. No wonder that was an attractive proposition to employers and it made them resist change in the docks industry. Labour was a cheap commodity available at any time and often without pay, and employers exploited that to the full. That is why there was no capital investment in the ports which would have changed methods of work and the lives of dock workers.

What have we seen since that time? Instead of the hook and the hand bogey there is now capital equipment each piece of which is worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, perhaps £250,000, and that equipment is operated by dock workers who were trained in the industry. There are side loaders, tug masters and other high-tech equipment. The industry is being transformed and the number of dockers is down from 80,000 to just over 9,000. In the pre-war era and in the immediate post-war era Liverpool employed up to 20,000 dockers and had a shipbuilding industry employing the same number. That has all gone and there has been no compensation and no replacement with new industry.

In the general election campaign the Prime Minister paraded around the country talking about her fears and saying that she wanted to do much for the inner cities. Liverpool is still a port-dependent city and by what they are doing the Government will make the situation there

[Mr. Eddie Loyden]

and in other ports in the north a damn sight worse than it is at present. We should lay bare the deception of the Government in putting forward this pernicious legislation.

There is no doubt that the campaign against the scheme has been carried out with the support of the employers to the accompaniment of howling and baying by Conservative Back Benchers. The scheme is seen as the last bastion of trade union power and has to be removed because, ideologically, the Conservative party and the employers do not like the phrase "workers' rights". Those rights were forced upon employers. Now the Government say that they want to remove that and give the employers a free hand. To do what? It will enable employers to return to casualisation and to sack the shop steward who is a bit of a lad, a bit of a nuisance who may cause problems for employers. The joint boards can decide who shall be sacked and the Government see that as ending his complete control over hiring and firing.

The Secretary of State appears to be chosen for the most outrageous tasks in the House, and that was illustrated by his performance on the review of social security that has left families all over Britain impoverished. People such as old-age pensioners are pleading for something to be done about what the Secretary of State did when he held another office. He has brought that philosophy and attitude to this industry.

It is clear that the Conservative party and the employers have waged a carefully orchestrated campaign and they see this as the most convenient and appropriate time to bring it to fruition in a most cynical and ruthless way. I am surethat in the long term the Government and employers will have to pay a price that they would not be prepared to pay if they knew the outcome of their policies. I do not have a crystal ball and do not know what sort of case will be presented by the employers and the trade unions.

The Government argue that they are a Government of non-intervention. However, their intervention is always in areas that affect workers and their rights and where they affect the benefits conferred on workers by the first post-war Labour Government, such as the Health Service and the welfare state. They do not like local authorities. They intervene everywhere except where it affects capital, the power of capital and the City. They have seen a shift of power and they want power handed back to the port employers. The dockers are quite right to use every method that they can to stop the Government's reckless actions. I shall give my support to dock workers for whatever action they take. They deserve it and they are right. For generations they have assisted other workers in dispute and in struggle. At the end of the day victory will be theirs.

6.56 pm

Mr. David Davis (Boothferry): I shall start by declaring an interest as a director of Tate and Lyle.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman is a part-timer.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East calls me a part-timer. After he made that allegation last year, I looked at our relative voting records. I was in the top 100 because I voted 338 times. The hon. Gentleman voted in just over half the Divisions, on 248 occasions—90 times fewer than me.

I agree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) on one matter. It is that, when the legislation that created the dock labour scheme came into being, it dealt with a real evil, the evil of the casual system as it stood then. The hon. Gentleman also explained why it is no longer a real evil. Time and technology have transformed the ports. He talked about expensive equipment, and that there may be cranes costing £500,000 or £1 million. People are not called off the street for half a day to operate a £1 million crane. A manager with a high capital investment in a port is interested in maintaining a continuous, maximum throughput. He has the same interest as the well-trained man who wants a permanent, highly skilled job. That is what has done away with the casual system.

Dr. Godman: It is possible to bring highly skilled, professional men from the streets to work for a short time —if they are unemployed. That is precisely what happens in my constituency with shipyard workers.

Mr. Davis: There are not too many unemployed heavy train drivers or container operators.

The second point is that, in a company with a very high capital investment, there is pressure on the management to keep the throughput up, to keep sales up—precisely the same interest as that of men who want to have permanent jobs. There is no interest in having an "up and down" shipping pattern.

I want to pursue some of the issues that were raised by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). He referred briefly to a number of malpractices that we have heard talked about. He said that ghosting was a result of unwillingness to train. In my port of Goole, there is a cement operation which unloads from self-discharging cement ships. When the ships come into port they are linked in one movement by sailors. There is no other work to be done, yet the customer has to pay for two dockers to ghost. I do not know how that would be dealt with by training; it is a simple additional useless cost.

Let us go on to bobbing and welting. In my port of Goole there are Swedish liner services. When the lines come in, 27 men are allocated to them. They need 18, so nine men go home—they "bob off" or welt. That does not arise from weak management; it arises because the manning levels are set by the joint board for the whole port. There is nothing that the management can do about it. There is no way in which it can negotiate its way out of that option.

Let us consider discipline. In Hull and Goole, which for this purpose are one area, 12 people were dismissed between 1980 and 1986. All 12 were reinstated. Among them was one man who had been convicted of smuggling and had gone to gaol for seven months. Despite the fact that he had committed a criminal offence, and the fact that that offence related directly to his work, he was reinstated when he came out of gaol. That sort of thing, plus similar gaolings for theft and other offences related directly to the work of the ports, is what drives customers away from those ports.

On the Humber, there are a number of scheme ports. They are all on deep water, are all served by motorways and railways, and all have good facilities, yet customers go to little ports at the end of country roads—ports with no

railways, or shallow water in fast-running rivers—precisely because they cannot bear the costs, the malpractice and the unpredictability of the scheme ports.

Mr. Prescott: The National Ports Council called for a report on the small wharves in 1972. It found that the capital costs in schemes were three times higher.

Mr. Davis: Precisely—17 years ago.*[Interruption.]* I will correct the hon. Member if he will pay attention. I was talking about the period 1980-86, when the proportion of the Humber throughput that was dealt with by private wharves increased from 15 per cent. to 21 per cent., entirely because of the terrible practices in these ports. The hon. Gentleman has attempted on many occasions to rubbish my arguments. He says that I do not know what I am talking about. Before coming to this House, I started work at the bottom of a transport company. I worked my way up to the position of managing director, and had to deal with problems of this sort. Hon. Members can decide for themselves which they consider to be the more useful experience: that, or serving gin and tonic on a Cunard liner. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way; it would have been easy not to do so, and the laugh would have been sustained.

People can make their judgments about the character and ability of hon. Members. I gave the hon. Gentleman the evidence of the National Ports Council, which is still relevant. That is the point that the hon. Gentleman must address.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman should learn to use the evidence of his own eyes. He should go and look at some of these ports. What is the advantage in going down a tiny country road to a port on a fast-flowing river that can be used only at marginal times by small ships? The hon. Gentleman's argument is ridiculous, and there is no point in pursuing it.

Mr. Prescott: The Government accepted it.

Mr. Davis: Seventeen years ago the Government accepted some other things, including this scheme.

This practice drives trade to other ports, and, as we have seen in the White Paper, it drives trade abroad. In 10 years, the share of intercontinental trade going through European ports has increased from 4 per cent. to 11 per cent. In other words, it has more than doubled in that period.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West referred to the WEFA report. He said that he did not like it. I, too, read the WEFA report very carefully, and was rather sceptical about it because, after all, it was sponsored by the port employers. But I was surprised by something different. The report completely ignored the concentration of trade going through the ports after 1992. We must expect, particularly on the Humber and in the north-east, a massive expansion of trade through ports—if the ports are viable. I am thinking of firms like Toyota, Nissan and Fujitsu. I understand that when Toyota went to Derby, the first thing it asked was, "Which is the way to Felixstowe?"—from Derby, for heaven's sake. My judgment is that the WEFA report under-estimated the employment that would be created by the abolition of the scheme. It will not be 50,000 but 100,000 jobs by 1993.

This Bill gives registered dock workers the same rights as are enjoyed by the dock workers in Felixstowe, where there was a 21 per cent. increase in cargoes last year and therefore, an increase in recruitment, and where up to £700 a week was paid to dockers. In conjunction with Dover, that part has had more investment than the rest of the scheme ports put together. [AN HON. MEMBER: "And not a penny from the public purse."] Exactly—not one penny from the public purse, but no casualisation, yet massive investment and growth.

I must draw to a close quickly, as the 10-minutes rule is in operation. I tried to look charitably at the perspective of the Labour party and the trade unions. I looked very carefully, and, like the Secretary of State, I found it very difficult to tie them together.

Mr. Prescott: Did the hon. Gentleman talk to them?

Mr. Davis: Yes, I talked to them as well. In a minute I shall come to the question of talking to the unions. It is an interesting point.

Let me summarise Labour's position. It seems to be to support a strike that cannot be won, to sustain a scheme that it knows is wrong, against a reform that it will not reverse. That is not particularly logical. Opposition Members cannot fault our laws, but they fear their own paymasters. They accuse us of provocation.

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier, I raised with Mr. Speaker a point of order about declaring interests. Mr. Speaker told me that he had replied in full to it last week. When the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) started his speech, somebody said, "part-timer". The register of interests says that he is a director of Tate and Lyle plc. May I have your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker? In view of the concern outside this Chamber about the amounts of money that Members of this House are earning on a part-time basis, would it be in order for the hon. Gentleman to declare how much he gets from Tate and Lyle, exactly what he has to do to earn it, and whether what he is now promoting constitutes an interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for me. At the start of his remarks the hon. Gentleman did declare that he was a director of Tate and Lyle. Whether the rules for the Register of Members' Interests require him to go beyond that is a matter of doubt.

Mr. Davis: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let us get back to the subject. Opposition Members did not like my reference to their paymasters, which is where their real interest lies. What do they really believe? In the past five years, there have been five attempts by the employers to negotiate with the unions—five attempts, five rebuttals, and any number of strike threats. However, I too was sceptical, so in January of this year, at a conference on the dock labour scheme, at which John Connolly was present, I raised the issue of negotiation. Mr. Connolly said no. He said that he was not interested in it.

The Labour party is not the same as the trade unions, so last year I introduced a ten-minute Bill proposing a negotiated settlement to the scheme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is also now working within a 10-minute rule.

Mr. Davis: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am coming to my last point. When I introduced my Bill, I said:

"Finally and most important, the Bill aims to create a timetable for both sides of the port industry to negotiate an end to the current practices which cripple the industry, and to give us a new industry by the crucial date of 1992."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1988; Vol. 133, c. 321.]

That offered four years of negotiation, but the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East and for Oldham, West voted against it. Where is their interest in negotiation now? Where is their interest in representing anybody except the 9,000 dockers? This Government and this party represent the 100,000; that is why we should not negotiate.

7.10 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) said, the historical reasons for introducing the dock labour scheme in 1946 were valid then. As the Minister of Labour at that time said, the labour market was such that only the fittest survived. However, in the first part of his speech, the hon. Member for Boothferry also gave us examples of how that system has become anachronistic and outlived its usefulness.

If there is any merit in consistency, I can point out that, in an amendment to the Loyal Address on 25 November 1975, the Liberal party tabled an amendment in which we said that we

"regret that the Gracious Speech contains proposals for the docks which, if carried out by an extension of the areas covered by the National Dock Labour Scheme, will lead to further unemployment in those areas, further strangulation of Great Britain's successful ports and higher costs and inefficiency."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1975; Vol. 901, c. 681.]

History has shown those remarks to be relevant.

In a sedentary intervention earlier a member of the Front Bench referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who has made his position clear. I remind the Minister that, as recently as 10 March 1988, the Under-Secretary of State for Employment said:

"I cannot believe that the mere abolition of the scheme would have all the desirable effects that they seem to believe."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1988; Vol. 129, c. 600.]

If he has changed his mind in a year, I have some time to persuade my hon. Friend to change his.

The 1975 amendment referred to "higher costs and inefficiency." We have heard already today of practices such as ghosting and bobbing. Inevitably, the costs of these practices have been passed on to the consumer. In competition with both non-scheme ports and continental ports, many of the registered scheme ports have undoubtedly lost out. The "jobs for life" provision is not part of the statutory scheme. Rather, it is a result of the Jones-Aldington agreement. It has meant that dockers have been retained on at least basic pay. This has led to overmanning and levels of employment have been reduced only through voluntary redundancy which, since 1972, has cost the taxpayer some £420 million. As a consequence, the labour force has aged. For example, in the port of Tees and Hartlepool, there is a shortage of labour but there is also a reluctance to recruit new labour, and no one working at that port is under 35.

The amendment warned also of the

"strangulation of Great Britain's successful ports".

Some have suggested that the scheme should be allowed to wither on the vine. I disagree with that suggestion because, as the White Paper says, the scheme operates in ports that have been in existence since 1945, and are our best ports, because of strategic and geographical positions and water depths. Earlier this year, the great historic port of Aberdeen, with a history of 800 years as a fishing port, came within an ace of losing that fishing trade as a result of the scheme. As Aberdeen's fishing interests have declined, there has been an increase in the use of Peterhead as a fishing port.

The amendment also warned that the scheme would lead to "further unemployment". Much of the unemployment has resulted not from the scheme but from the changes in technology and the move from the west to the east. The hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) referred to the difficulties at the port of Manchester, many of which are due to the fact that the Manchester ship canal is not capable of taking the larger ships on which so much trade is now carried.

The dock labour scheme can hardly be said to be a guarantee of employment. Since 1972, only the ports of Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Poole have shown any increase in employment. I suspect that this increase, certainly in the cases of the first two and possibly in the case of the last, is related to oil and gas developments in the southern basin of the North sea and the English channel. The figures speak for themselves. Let us compare the figures in 1972 and 1988. In London they are 11,702 and 1,703; in Hull 2,064 and 665; in Liverpool and Birkenhead, 8,401 and 1,395. Clearly the scheme is not a guarantee of employment.

Replying to an intervention from the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), the Secretary of State dismissed lightly some of the achievements made by the dock labour force in places such as Liverpool. In spite of the decrease in employment, there has been a considerable increase in productivity, and other advances. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) would want it to be recorded that, since 1982, Liverpool has been a profitable port. Last year, it made a pre-tax profit of £5,885,000, some 56 per cent. up on 1987. The port's industrial record has been transformed and tonnage has steadily gone up, with a 10·2 per cent. increase in 1987, to 19·5 million tonnes.

Although Liverpool has shown great adaptation to circumstances and the capacity to develop as a port, we cannot overlook the fact that, according to figures that I have seen today, there is no registered docker in Liverpool under the age of 35, and the average age is 47·8. That is a matter for concern.

Mr. Loyden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: I should like to give way, but I have only 10 minutes. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand. If these ports are to develop and take the opportunities, new blood must be introduced and the present scheme does not encourage the port employers to do that.

So far, much of the debate has concentrated on consultation. Introducing a White Paper one day and publishing a Bill the next is provocative, to put it mildly. I hope that Ministers will agree to consultation and that the unions will have a meaningful dialogue with the port employers. If the unions insist on changing a statutory scheme to a voluntary one, discussions will never get off the ground.

I can understand, from my examination of the history, the anxieties about the wide-scale reintroduction of casual labour. Why should there not be discussions between unions and port employers to try to get some contractual, negotiated guarantees that there will not be the reintroduction of casual labour, as the port employers have suggested? The general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union said that he found that as convincing as the statement that the National Health Service is safe in the hands of the Prime Minister. Perhaps with some negotiation he can get some firmer guarantees.

There must also be negotiations about training after the interim period changes. My understanding is that, on 1 January, regulations that would give non-scheme ports a requirement to do with training functions came into being. What will happen after the transitional period to the provision on training in the scheme ports? The training of new recruits for those ports is needed above all else. If we are passing legislation to end that scheme, we cannot leave training hanging in the air without any sign from the Government about what they see as the provision of training for new recruits once the scheme is abolished and all ports become non-registered.

I and many others believe that the abolition of the scheme will lead to an increase in jobs and employment opportunities in many ports, but it is expected that initially there will be a fall-off in employment. A reduction of 10 per cent. has been mentioned by some. That will be a matter of concern for those who are most directly affected. However, the redundancy terms are generous and many, especially those aged 50—about 40 per cent. of those who work in registered dock scheme ports are of that age—may be tempted to get out and to take the terms that are on offer. If they do, it is important that provision should be made to assist them in retraining for other forms of employment in addition to giving them money. I believe that getting out and taking the terms will be an initial response to the Bill.

There will be opportunities in the long term, not least as a result of the competition that will come as we march towards 1992. We can look towards more jobs being created in many of our ports. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) fairly said, there is a need for a strategy for the ports, and that will not be introduced automatically through the operation of the free market. Many of the ports on the west coast, not least on Merseyside and the Clyde, can be entrances to the European Community for trade coming from north America. The Government have been silent on how they would like to see the ports develop the opportunities that are available to them, especially those on the west coast, in 1992. My parliamentary colleagues will support the Bill but we want to hear more ideas from the Government on a general port strategy.

7.22 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I am glad to have been called to contribute to the debate. The Southampton docks, which constitute one of the largest scheme ports, have been one of my most prominent political problems since I entered the House. We have heard this evening about the rights of workers but we have not heard much about workers who were made unemployed as a result of numerous strikes. We have not heard much of the ancillary workers who suddenly find that the port is not working, which means that their employers give them the sack and perhaps re-engage them later.

I suppose that the Southampton docks have suffered more than most docks. The port was derelict for over 12 months from 1981 onwards. We had a succession of strikes and as a result the entire city began to suffer. No passenger ships came in and the channel ports operation ceased. The roll-on/roll-off activity moved to Portsmouth. That trade was lost. The atmosphere of the city was blighted by the atmosphere of the port. During this period there was a more militant approach to employment than one could even hazard a guess at merely by being in a place such as the House of Commons.

There was an extremely fierce chief shop steward. Fortunately, that man took his redundancy pay about four or five years ago. I believe that he is now managing a public house in Southampton. He led a militant bunch of shop stewards who were only too anxious at any time to impose new obligations on employers.

The Conservative party cannot be exonerated completely from blame for the legislation that was built up to form protectionism. It was during the time that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was Prime Minister that we agreed to the Jones-Aldington arrangements. That was perhaps the greatest and most powerful lever that we gave to registered dock workers. There were two significant features of the arrangements. The first was that port employers would have to pay a basic rate—I believe that today it is near £150 a week—to any registered dock worker, even if there was no work to do. Secondly, and most serious of all, the survivors of the then strike had to take up their percentage of the dock workers who no longer had an employer. The costs of port employers escalated and at the end of the day there were very few employers. Townsend Thoresen became so fed up with the system that it decided to move to Portsmouth. That was one of its main reasons for the move.

The passengers of the Cunard shipping company had to manhandle their baggage when the dockers claimed that that was part of their dock work. The QE2 had to go to Cherbourg on one of its trips to off load and load passengers. They were flown out from the United Kingdom and flown back. The baggage had to be handled by French dock workers. The problem was that registered dock workers were beginning to get a jugular-vein grip on the scheme ports.

I do not blame the dockers. The Labour Government presented a scheme and a Conservative Government added to it the two conditions to which I have referred. If I were presented with Christmas every day, I would not refuse it. I would say, "No, I do not really want all these guarantees. I do not want to have a job when all those around me are losing theirs." My response would be, "This is obviously a good trade union agreement and we must stick to it as a matter of life and death." Unfortunately, it was the life of the registered dock workers and the death of many port employers. I imagine that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) was a dock worker for many years. He said that the rights of the workers were such that they had to be protected. He appeared to have a wrong-end-of-the-telescope view of the problem. Not all dock workers are registered dockers. Indeed, in almost every port the registered dockers comprise only about one third of the labour force.

[Mr. James Hill]

It has emerged clearly this evening that those on the Opposition Front Bench are running pretty scared. They know that there has been disagreement. I have a cutting from my local newspaper in which it is stated that the dock union chief in Southampton "slates leader Todd". The article reads:

"TGWU docks officer Dennis Harryman said the union's executive should have plumped for an immediate ballot for strike action rather than Mr. Todd's policy of deferring the ballot".

The article continues:

"'Ron Todd has fragmented things by giving those ports who don't want to come out a legitimate way out of strike action'"

When there is such discontent near the top of a large trade union, we must suspect that there will be trouble for the Trades Union Congress and for the Labour party. The Labour party has realised this and the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has obviously been given instructions to play down what he has been saying and what has been read out on so many occasions today.

As a constituency man, I can go only from what I read in my local newspaper. It has printed a good but short letter by someone who obviously knows a great deal about the ports. He writes:

"'The furore caused by the Opposition and the trades unions over the abolition of the docks labour scheme strikes me as being hypocritical.

Here we have organisations who are supposedly opposed to privilege and class distinction upholding working practices which, if applied to the workforce of the whole country, would be unworkable, resulting in bankruptcy and mass unemployment."'

I do not know whether I go along with that fully, but there is certainly a reason for abolishing the scheme. I am surprised it has lasted so long—and I am surprised that the Labour Government did not kill it—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because it destroys jobs. It is as plain as that.

In the future, when the scheme has been abolished, there will be further work in the port of Southampton. The Bill does not mean the end of those 700 dockers' jobs—it is a beginning. We have heard that the more aged dockers can now receive a redundancy payment of £35,000, practically unheard of in any other industry—and, in any case, we need to bring fresh people into the dock work force.

The main thing that I like about the provisions is that in future workers in the port will be able to identify with an employer rather than be moved about at the whim of the dock labour board. There is a lot to be said for the Bill. I hope that it will have an easy passage through Committee and that it will be on the statute book by July.

7.30 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Two versions of events have been given in the debate. One version has been given by Conservative Members, who generated the baying, howling and screeching that accompanied the initial announcement of the Bill. They have made deliberate attempts to attack the arguments of my hon. Friends, who are those most likely to have had experience of working in, rather than managing, the docks. Therein lies the difference in attitude.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) has considerable hands-on experience not only as a member of the Transport and General Workers Union, but of working in the docks. When we read the report of the debate in *Hansard* tomorrow, that difference in attitude will come across clearly. I shall not go over the ground so adequately covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Garston, save to associate myself with all his comments. Instead, I wish to knock some of the suggestions that have been put forward about why the Bill is required at this time.

The city of Dundee lies on the River Tay. For many years it has required the port to bring in the main sustenance for Dundee's manufacturing base—jute. Although Dundee has a long history as a port—dealing not only, but mainly, in jute—its history has not been recognised in the comments of the Secretary of State or his hon. Friends. In Dundee, which is a scheme port, approximately £1 million will have been invested by the Dundee port authority in the period 1986 to 1992. That investment has been made because the authority is confident of a return on it. Not only will that investment be made until 1992, but even now it is predicted that it will rise to £2 million after 1992. Dundee port authority can make that commitment because of its confidence in the adaptability and flexibility of its partner, the Dundee Stevedore Company, and in its dock-worker employees, all of whom are committed to the long-term prosperity not only of the port but of all the people who live in Dundee.

The Dundee dock workers created the stability which led to the ending of the scandal of 250,000 tonnes of Scottish grain going south in lorries to lie in stores before being exported from ports in the south. In 1979, the port of Dundee handled 800 tonnes of grain. With a change of management in the 1980s and a new determination to work with the Dundee Stevedore Company and the dockers, four new sheds were built, and a new grain elevator and mechanised handling equipment were installed. As a result, the figure rose in 1988 to 128,000 tonnes of Scottish grain being exported from a Scottish port.

That investment by the Dundee port authority has been possible because of the good working relationship in the scheme port of Dundee where there are no shareholders to pay off. There have been record profits because prices have been held steady for two years due to the flexibility and adaptability of the work force and, indeed, are likely to rise this year and next year by no more than the rate of inflation. As I have said, there are no shareholders to pay off, and because of the money that the port has managed to gain from the EEC there has been massive investment and development in Dundee itself. The authority's investment in Dundee's future started long before the Secretary of State's announcement in the House. Dundee is a scheme port and working together has meant that it has been able to provide for its long-term future since long before the announcement.

The Secretary of State is no longer in his place, but in his absence perhaps I can address this point to the Minister who is present—the Minister for Public Transport, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo)—and ask him whether, having started the precedent of using selected quotations from selected newspapers in support of the abolition of the scheme, the Secretary of State will accept quotations from the same Scottish newspapers about the abolition or otherwise of the poll tax in Scotland? I suspect that, if we asked the Secretary of State

whether he accepted the views of those newspapers on the poll tax as it applies to Scotland, we should get a quite different response.

As the Secretary of State has referred to the efforts made by the port employers to discuss the scheme, may we have on record the dates when the port employers officially wrote, offered or asked for negotiations or when such requests were made formally, across the table, during negotiations? Let us have on record the dates of the five occasions when that occurred.

The Dundee port authority is convinced that it does not need these provisions to ensure a profitable port in Dundee. Speaking the day after the Secretary of State's announcement in the House, the chief executive of the port authority, Captain John Watson, said that he had been taken by surprise, as he was sure had a number of people in the industry, by the speed with which the Government intended to proceed. He added:

"The battle cry of late seems to have been get rid of the scheme with little done by anyone to assure registered dock workers that there is life after the scheme."

Like other employers, the Dundee Stevedore Company has now responded to that statement. I remind the House that prior to the scheme, there were 68 companies in Dundee which hired men, mainly on a day-to-day basis, in much the same conditions as those outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Garston, which were not only archaic but an insult to the workers and to any form of employer-worker relationship.

The Dundee Stevedore Company has made it quite clear that, because of the amount of work and because of its duty to those who use the port for jute, paper and BP oil, there should not be any reduction in the number of dockers employed in the port. The chairman, Mr. Ronnie Caldwell, has confirmed that to me today. More importantly, he confirmed it to the dockers in a letter last Friday in which he gave a guarantee that there would be no return to the system of casual labour and said that he looked forward to working with a skilled, competitive and motivated labour force. He emphasised the need for management and employees to work together to take advantage of the competitive opportunities which exist. I emphasise that that was said against the backdrop of a good working relationship.

When I have asked dockers how they respond to those comments, naturally they have said that they are happy to hear that initial statement from their employer, but they have made the point that there is a thing called agency labour and that it is already used by several ports. It is also used in other industries in which there is a core work force, but where there is no continuity of employment. Continuity of employment should be a vital component of any new agreement. The dockers would not be asking or expecting too much to expect that the negotiations should start now so that conditions similar to those that they now have can be discussed and perhaps agreed with their present employers.

The port employers say that they want to talk to the workers and the workers say that they want to talk to their employers, but they want to ensure that those discussions are not held in an atmosphere in which pressure is being put solely on the workers to give up something for which they have fought and struggled for many years. The Government could help that process by making clear in Committee exactly what they would like to see replace the dock labour scheme, and what guarantees they intend to provide to the industry's workers.

A characteristic of those who work in the ports is fear and uncertainty about an industry whose history is one of regulation being required to ensure decent, humane working conditions for those working in it. I do not want a return to the days when dock workers had to go round the various pubs in Dundee—whether it was Black Jock's, the Market Bar or Brady's—and bribe the gaffer with drink, and the next morning have to remind him or scrabble about on the ground for the few pegs that were left because the gaffer had forgotten that he had been paid the price of work the night before.

We want the industry to be regulated. That regulation can only come through discussion, and the workers want that discussion. We shall not support the Bill because of the deliberate attempts by the Government to take away rights hard fought for by workers in an industry which requires regulation.

7.41 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): I intervene briefly, because there are no docks in my constituency. However, the towns of Andover and of nearby Basingstoke are major customers of ports, and in this debate I speak for the customer. Much of industry's competitive ability is affected by the cost of transport and of handling commodities through our docks. Cargo handling is more expensive in United Kingdom ports than it is in continental ports, to the disadvantage of our country's manufacturers, jobs and prosperity.

The first question that arises from the debate is whether there is now a case for treating the 9,400 scheme port dockers differently from the remaining 3,600 port workers. Listening to the debate, it is clear why dock workers used to need different employment arrangements. I may be an unlikely ally for the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer)—who has not yet caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—but on many occasions during the 20 or more years since I entered the House, I have heard the hon. Gentleman speak out against the evils of the old system of casual labour.

I agree with the hon. Members for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) and for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), that the system of hiring casual labour was abhorrent and that employers behaved unacceptably. I join Opposition Members in looking back with anger at what used to happen. However, that was many years ago. Today, we must consider instead the current situation, by examining the non-scheme ports.

Today's dockers in non-scheme ports are well paid. Many of them are better paid than those working in scheme ports. They are represented by the same trade union, and casual labour accounts for only 6 per cent. of their work force. That figure is comparable with the percentage of casual workers in catering and in many other industries, including no doubt many of the services with which right hon. and hon. Members are provided through the facilities of the House.

The dock labour scheme may have been the right answer in its day, but times have changed. The House should look at the downside of that scheme. First, there is the downward spiral to consider. A port or firm may suffer contraction, perhaps because it deals in a certain

[Sir David Mitchell]

commodity, or because, as in Liverpool, of our trade with the European Community and the expansion of cargo handling through east coast ports. The contraction may be due to a commodity such as leather being replaced by plastic, or to some other change of pattern in trade.

Whatever the reason, some firms within a particular port will suffer a decline and go out of business. When that happens, their dock workers are allocated to other employers who neither need nor want them. The consequence is a serious additional cost for those other firms, making their operations uneconomical and forcing them out of business. The downward spiral is exacerbated as their unwanted labour is in turn dumped on to other firms, who find themselves severely overmanned and bearing all the higher operating costs and disadvantages that follow from that situation.

That downward spiral has two further effects. First, the profits of the remaining firms will fall, so that they are unable to finance the costs of modernisation and of installing new equipment on the scale that they should. Secondly, as modern equipment usually requires fewer people to operate it, the overmanned firms have no case for investing in it. One of the major downside effects of the dock labour scheme is the extent to which it inhibits and damages investment in the scheme ports on the scale that would allow them to compete effectively.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) referred to investment in certain scheme ports, but it is way below the level required to achieve competitive, cost-effective handling of cargo through those ports.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman is right, and he should give examples.

Sir David Mitchell: One can clearly illustrate the downward spiral by examining the way in which scheme ports have lost trade to non-scheme ports. Earlier, one of my hon. Friends spoke of the way in which manufacturers avoid sending their goods through scheme ports because of all the damage that comes from doing that. Felixstowe's trade has increased 14 times over the past 20 years, but at the same time we have seen a decline in the volume of trade at scheme ports.

Investment is the key to cost-effective movement of goods through our docks and ports. The abolition of the dock labour scheme will help to make more investment possible. I hope that the House will support the Bill, which will result in better-paid dockers and—speaking as the voice of the dock's customers—a better, more cost-effective service to manufacturers.

7.47 pm

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): I am glad that I have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that I am able to pledge my full support for dock workers in Liverpool and throughout the United Kingdom. I speak on their behalf because I probably have more relatives employed on the docks than any other right hon. and hon. Member. More than 80 years ago my great-grandfather worked on the Liverpool docks, as did my two grandfathers and my father's brothers. Recently, my own brothers worked under the inhuman and disgraceful casual labour system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) spoke of the way that workers were hired in Dundee. The same was true of Liverpool dockers. They were treated like cattle, and were employed only if they bought the foreman or the ganger a pint of beer, or even because they were of the same religion. We never want to see such things happen again in the docks.

The Secretary of State says that abolition of the scheme will not mean a return to casual labour. However, I believe that employers will jump at the opportunity to make bigger profits at the expense of dock workers. In business questions last week, I suggested to the Leader of the House that right hon. and hon. Members who serve as consultants to port employers should not be allowed to participate in debates on the Bill or to vote on it. I was not satisfied with the reply from the Leader of the House, and when my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) raised the same point with Mr. Speaker, he received a similar answer.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said earlier, some employers are inclined to bring back casual labour. This is nothing but a deliberate ploy by the Government to provoke a dock strike. Thatcher dogmatism is showing its hand. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) put his finger neatly on the button last week when he said that the Government would find a strike very convenient in cutting imports. He also referred to the Government's failure to refer the scheme to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

There has been no consultation between the port employers and the TGWU. The Government have been influenced by Conservative backwoodsmen—many of whom have never seen a dock in their lives—especially those in paid posts who will gain if the scheme is abolished. There is also an unholy rush to get the Bill on to the statute book, when more important Bills such as the Children Bill are awaiting consideration. The port of Liverpool employed 25,000 workers 30 or 40 years ago. Now it employs fewer than 2,000. That does not say much for the argument that jobs are for life, which the House should recognise as a myth.

This Bill has been born out of party political considerations and expediency: action is being taken against dock workers in support of Tory dogma. I understand that Ron Todd, general secretary of the TGWU, is trying to open discussions with the port employers, but I shall support the Liverpool dockers whether or not they receive official backing for a strike. They believe and trust in us, and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) has already spelt out what they have gone through over the years. Like him I pledge my support to the dockers, not only in Liverpool, but throughout the United Kingdom. We will not agree to any system that would bring back casualisation and use dock workers as chattels in the hands of unscrupulous employers.

I shall conclude my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker—as I know that more than 40 hon. Members are trying to catch your eye—by saying that Opposition Members will give full support to the dock workers, and will oppose the Tory Government's deliberate attempt to provoke a strike that no one else wants and to put the clock back many years.

7.53 pm

Mr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): It was the economist Milton Friedman who said that there is no such thing as a free lunch. He meant that in any industry, whatever the cost, someone somewhere must pay for waste, inefficiency, restrictive practices and a failure to come to terms with economic reality. Until a few years ago there were quite a few free-lunchers in my constituency: managements that refused to come to terms with market forces and trade unions that clung to restrictive practices.

The history of my constituency is intertwined with ports. Neston, on the Dee, was originally Nelson's dockyard; it later became the main port for Irish trade. Ellesmere Port, on the Manchester ship canal, was a great transit port between the canal boats of the Shropshire union canal and the ocean-going vessels on the ship canal. Now, however, the largest employers in my constituency are not the ports but Vauxhall Motors and Shell, which have important lessons for the docks industry and which also rely on that industry.

The Vauxhall site in my constituency was purchased by General Motors as a future expansion site for Europe. It could have been one of the largest vehicle manufacturing plants in Europe; instead restrictive practices, militant trade unions and repeated strikes ensured that almost all the investment went to Germany. As late as 1983 the Vauxhall plant in my constituency lost 60 man days per employee through industrial action; in 1987 it lost only two. Those figures illustrate graphically the change in attitudes over the past few years. Vauxhall has come back from the brink; there is new investment and a sense of reality, although the empty acres remain as a lasting monument to the missed opportunities of the 1970s.

Similarly, the Shell plant in my constituency was once the largest refinery in Europe. In the early 1980s, however, an independent survey showed that it was one of the most inefficient in terms of labour utilisation and working practices. It was overstaffed and full of restrictive practices; it was an unpleasant place to work; attitudes were counter-productive, and employees were not involved in decision-making. Many thought that the company owed them a living. Profit was a dirty word, and people felt that they had a right to a job without any commitment. It was yesterday's operation with yesterday's ideas and practices. Without a fundamental change in attitudes and values, the plant would have closed.

I am pleased to say that that plant now has a secure future. The company has invested massively; jobs are secure, and pay has increased. Why has that happened? It has happened simply because people recognised that there was only one forward and that a massive change in attitudes was required. As a result, the refinery at Stanlow is now a monument to the success of the second industrial revolution.

Stories like those of Vauxhall and Shell are commonplace, not only in my constituency but throughout the United Kingdom. But what about the docks industry? Today it is nowhere near as important to the local economy in my constituency. The silting of the River Dee has meant the closure of the port of Neston. The major part of the Ellesmere Port docks is now the national waterways museum: although a major tourist attraction, it is not a working port. Some docks remain: in particular, we have an efficient, modern container terminal and a regular roll-on/roll-off ferry service to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that the port would be much more efficient without the dock labour scheme.

Many registered ports in this country are overstaffed and full of restrictive practices. They abound in counter-productive attitudes. They are unpleasant places to work, where some people think that they have a right to a job without commitment or that others owe them a living. Those are fundamentally the same problems and attitudes that characterised Shell and Vauxhall, and the national dock labour scheme has perpetuated them. It has stifled initiative, development and enterprise.

Is it not ironic that the once great port of Liverpool, when it was registered in 1947, had a work force of 22,000? It now has a workforce of only 1,200, and no dock worker has been hired there for 16 years. There are dockers surplus to requirements and a shortage of work, and industrial disputes continue. By contrast, Felixstowe has seen prosperity. Wages are high: some workers are earning as much as £700 a week. Overtime is plentiful, and 2,000 people are employed. In the past two years the labour force has increased by 200. Last year the port handled 21 per cent. more cargo, and not a single day has been lost through industrial relations disputes since 1974. They are the sharp contrasts that highlight the capacity of the national dock labour scheme to stop progress and drive jobs away from registered scheme ports. Those attitudes and practices have not helped the nation, local economies or registered dock workers.

When trade unions abuse the privileges that the law has granted to them, ultimately it is rank and file union members who suffer. To mix metaphors, all those free lunches eventually come home to roost. As John Harvey-Jones, the ex-chairman of ICI remarked:

"the reality of the future is that the interests of trade unions, union members and management lie together."

It is sad that entrenched attitudes have made the Bill necessary, but necessary it is. It is time for trade unions to realise the wisdom of John Harvey-Jones's words and it is time for Opposition Members to stop defending the indefensible. They do themselves no good whatsoever. They only show, yet again, that they are yesterday'smen with yesterday's ideas, yesterday's policies and yesterday's attitudes. The interests of dock managers and dock workers lie together. They lie in the abolition of this dreadful scheme.

8 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): As one of yesterday's men, I am not delighted to follow one of tomorrow's casualties at the next general election.

Mr. Woodcock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ewing: No.

I am sure that John Harvey-Jones will not be pleased about having been quoted by a Conservative Member of Parliament in a debate of this nature. I know of no other industrialist in this country who has such a progressive outlook towards the trade union movement as John Harvey-Jones, whose reputation has not been enhanced by what was said about him by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Woodcock). I am sure that he would want me to defend him.

Earlier I raised a point of order and expressed my anger about the way in which Conservative Members were

[Mr. Ewing]

behaving. We were talking about people's jobs and the future of their families. In the few minutes that are available to me, I want to emphasise that point of order.

I do not apologise for my personal characteristics. I do not find it possible to mourn for the dead of Liverpool from 3.30 to 5 o'clock and then from 5 o'clock to 10 o'clock to bay at the dockers of Liverpool. What happened this afternoon was absolutely disgusting. I have never witnessed such reprehensible behaviour as that of Conservative Back Benchers when the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was speaking. They knew that he was dealing with the future of working people.

I put that on record for a deliberate reason. Like most other hon. Members, I make available to local newspapers the comments that I make in the House. I want everybody —Conservative, Labour, nationalists, Democrats and those of no politics—in the Falkirk, East constituency to understand the contempt with which my dockers were treated by Conservative Members during the early part of the debate.

The Secretary of State gave the game away. Part of the speech that he read and that he did not have time to change was written for him in the belief that today we should be at the start of a strike in the scheme ports.

Mr. Fowler *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ewing: The Secretary of State can make faces, but the fact is that the Secretary of State wanted, and still wants, a strike by the dockers.

Mr. Fowler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ewing: No.

The Secretary of State wants a strike. When he spoke at a dinner last Friday evening, the Chancellor of the Exchequer challenged the dockers to go on strike. That is why I am absolutely delighted that Ron Todd and John Connolly have managed, by their wise counsel, to persuade the dockers not to strike. If working people go on strike, they must do so on the grounds they choose, not on grounds chosen for them by the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Employment. They must go on strike at a time that they choose, not at a time chosen for them by the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Employment. Furthermore, they must go on strike when they have a reasonable chance of success, not when working people and their families will be trampled on, as they were effectively trampled on by the conduct of Conservative Back Benchers during the early part of the debate.

There are three elements to be considered in the ports industry, one of which has not yet been mentioned. The three elements are the port employers, the dockers and the shipowners. The shipowner plays an important part.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman has made a number of interventions. He should show some respect for dockers, if not for me, and be quiet for a minute.

The shipowner plays an important part in the development of the docks industry. Reference has already been made to the Scottish ports. Scottish shipowners are deliberately choosing not to bring their vessels to any Scottish port, be it a scheme port or a non-scheme port. They are paying the road haulage costs for goods to go from wherever they are manufactured in Scotland to Felixstowe, usually, because, from a shipowner's point of view, it is cheaper to steam his vessel into Felixstowe—it has nothing to do with the dockers who work at Felixstowe or at Grangemouth but everything to do with steaming costs—than to steam his vessel into Grangemouth. It is cheaper for him to pay the road haulage costs to take the goods to the vessel rather than to bring the vessel to the goods.

The effect that that has had on the Scottish economy ought not to be under-estimated. Until about eight years ago, 75 per cent. of all the goods manufactured in Scotland for export went out through Scottish ports. Nothing has changed, except that only 23 per cent. of the goods manufactured in Scotland for export now go through Scottish ports. The rest go down to Felixstowe because of the grid system, or the cross-subsidisation that is employed by shipowners. The Government will do nothing about it. The shipowners will eventually close the Scottish ports. The national dock labour scheme will not close them. That is why the Bill is such nonsense. It does not even begin to tackle the root of the problem.

After the shipowners have closed the Scottish ports, the cross-subsidisation will be withdrawn and the cost of taking goods from Scotland for export will be enormously increased. That is why one of our main industries, the Scotch whisky industry, is already taking steps to ensure that it does not fall into the trap that is being set for it by the shipowners. The industry is making arrangements—all credit to it—to construct a terminal so that it can export Scotch whisky from Scottish ports. As soon as Scottish shipowners succeed in closing the Scottish ports, the grid system will come to an end and cross-subsidisation will be withdrawn. There will then be an enormous increase in the cost of our exports.

The Minister tells us that the Bill is crucial. It is so crucial that it did not form part of the Gracious Speech or of the Conservative party's 1987 election manifesto, only two years ago. It did not need to be introduced at this time without discussion. The Minister does not want discussions. He does not want the port employers and the union to get together, let alone to speak to the unions. The Bill is about confrontation. That is what the Government have wanted since the middle of last week when the announcement was made.

The Bill has nothing to do with 1992 and the free market. If that is what it is supposed to be, it shows a complete failure to understand the nature of that free market. The Minister talks about the need to make our ports competitive for 1992. Why, then, did the Minister for Roads and Traffic come to the Dispatch Box some months ago and boast that this country has not taken a penny piece from the EEC regional development fund for transport to prepare our transport system for 1992? The French Government have taken 48 per cent. of all their rail network investment from the EEC regional fund to construct a brand new rail network to get their goods to their ports in 1992.

The Bill has nothing to do with 1992 and everything to do with destroying the rights of the workers. I shall not go into the Lobby this evening happily, but with great regret

that it is necessary to oppose a measure designed to take dockers and the industry in which they work back to the Victorian age.

8.10 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I am glad to have the opportunity to correct the record so eloquently distorted by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing). I remind the House that the Labour party, which is supposed to care so passionately about the Bill, is represented in the Chamber by only about a dozen supporters. A few more were present earlier, but only a handful. That exposes the myth that the Labour party is doing its utmost to support the dockers outside. The hon. Member for Falkirk, East is distorting history and doing himself a disservice by suggesting that the bad behaviour has been on the Conservative Benches given that earlier there was a tremendous amount of raucous noise from the Opposition, who sought to howl down my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Mr. Speaker himself suggested that the noise was coming from both sides of the House.

I certainly have no interest—I am not trying to be pious—in embarrassing the Labour party; it is sufficiently embarrassed already on this issue. We have no interest in trying to make Labour Front Bench spokesmen look even more uncertain about their position. We have no interest, either, in embarrassing the leadership of the TGWU. We certainly have no interest in a strike. That is the first and significant point that I shall make.

We have heard a great deal of nonsense from the Opposition. Let us be sensible for a moment. A strike will do a lot of damage to the docks. It will do a great deal of damage to the industry that we seek to support, to the customers, and the companies and to employees throughout the dock industry. It would certainly damage the union. It will do much damage to the Opposition, who will be in a difficult position, and to the Government. Strikes damage the country, Governments and everyone else. We have no interest in a strike and there is no need or justification for a strike.

I share the views expressed by many Opposition Members and endorsed by Conservative Members that nobody in his right mind wants a return to the sort of casual labour system that, as we all recognise even if we did not personally experience it, was an utterly intolerable feature of the immediate post-war period. The scheme was introduced as a means of disposing of casual labour. Opposition and Conservative Members alike understand that the world has changed dramatically. It is a totally different world—highly capital-intensive with totally new techniques—and employers need a highly skilled professional labour force. There is no way that one could run the business on a casual basis. A representative of the National Association of Port Employers said:

> "Over the coming weeks and months, I have no doubt that employers in each of the ports will be sitting down with their employees to discuss working arrangements which will enable them to realise the full potential of their port following removal of the Scheme and the extra competitiveness it will give the industry."

The same press release says:

> "We will not be returning to systems of casual employment, nor any variant of it."

When the scheme goes, and before any legislation is passed, there should be negotiations between different employers and their work forces on new contracts of employment. That is the constructive way forward. The House has to make a decision about the abolition of the dock labour scheme. That is our decision. It has been made absolutely clear that the new contracts of employment will mean a guarantee that there will be no return to casual employment, and it is up to the employers and employees to negotiate that position.

Opposition Members ask why we are abolishing the scheme in this way. One might say that it has been done rapidly but, equally, many Conservative Members would say that it is 10 years too late. From the debate so far, it has been painfully clear that we are faced with a simple proposition. The unions have made it clear that they are not prepared to negotiate about the abolition of the scheme. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has made it clear that the unions are not prepared to negotiate about the abolition of the scheme independently of discussions about the future of the port industry. Let us not be naive about it: Opposition Members know, and we know, that the simple issue is the abolition of the scheme itself. There is little room to negotiate on that. There may be plenty of room for negotiations between employers and employees about different contracts of employment; so be it. We have a very simple proposition with very little scope for negotiating about the scheme itself, given the attitude of the trade unions.

Is it better to make an announcement and take six months of negotiation about something that is clearly understood by hon. Members and have six months of dispute, with threats hanging over the industry? Is it not better to deal with the matter quickly and cleanly and thus get both sides facing the key issue? The position that the Government have adoped is helpful to the industry, to the unions and to everybody. It means that a clear-cut decision will be taken rapidly. Is it not easier for Opposition Members to make up their minds about their position on a short time scale, rather than in a long drawn-out process of torture over many months ahead?

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East referred to the dock workers of Liverpool. Those of us in the south of England watched the port of London being destroyed by the dock labour scheme. The same was also largely true of Liverpool. The dock labour scheme has done more to destroy jobs in Liverpool, London and other ports than almost any other single factor. Those of us who are concerned about having a thriving port industry, preserving jobs, encouraging new investment and recapturing some of the trade lost to Europe say that we should end the scheme. We are the ones who are concerned about protecting jobs.

The Government's method of handling the Bill rapidly is for the good of the industry and is not provocative. We have no interest whatever in a dock strike, and I hope passionately that it will be avoided. The abolition of the scheme will generate a great deal more in investment and will be good for dockers' jobs in the future.

Finally, I have a story that might please the Opposition and might seem to make the Government's position more difficult. I represent a constituency which contains an immensely successful scheme port that has grown from virtually nothing 25 years ago to become Britain's sixth largest port in non-oil tonnage. It is a success story and I pay tribute to the management and to the registered dock workers who have helped achieve it. It was virtually a green field site and it is now the Medway port authority,

[Mr. Roger Moate]

operating from the port of Sheerness. But its growth could have been greater and will be dramatically greater when the restrictions are removed. The port is in the south-east of England, it has superb deep water, it is strategically located for the continent and has many investment attractions.

When the restrictions are removed, there will be increased incentives for new employers to take on much of the work that has not yet moved to the dockside, including much value-added work that could be done there instead of further inland. That has been deterred by the scheme and I have no hesitation whatsoever in forecasting that, in two or three years' time, the Labour party will have forgotten all about the scheme. The dockers concerned will be more confident, more highly paid and more optimistic about the future. The ending of the dock labour scheme is long overdue and its removal will add greatly to the prospect of extra industrial investment on the waterfront.

The Labour party proclaims that it is fighting for 9,400 registered dock workers, although it is not fighting very strongly. It is trying to retain privileges that are not enjoyed by other people working in the docks. There must be about 100,000 people directly and indirectly empoloyed in the docks in this country. Why is the Labour party fighting for the privileges of the few and neglecting the injustices that are thereby done to the many?

8.21 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I am not a natural friend of monopolies of any kind, but I believe that the Government are absolutely wrong to abolish in such a fashion a scheme that has served the industry well. First, it has allowed a managed rundown of the labour force in the docks and an essential transition to change in which the workers have co-operated because they have had confidence given by the scheme. Secondly, the scheme has provided good industrial relations in the docks. The days lost in strike per employee in the docks in 1987 were half the average for workers in transport generally. The third and most important effect of the scheme has been to put working people on a more equal basis with capital. That is why the Government do not like it. It has given the workers a say in their jobs and in the way in which the industry is run, and has placed emphasis on training, which is vital in the docks and which the management wish to cut back because they do not want to spend money. For all those reasons, it has been a good scheme and it is particularly wrong to abolish it in such a fashion, without consultation and at great speed.

The arguments adduced against the scheme are largely irrelevant. The scheme is not the major problem in the docks. There are two major problems affecting docks in Britain. First, the Government do not have a policy for docks but have allowed and encouraged a proliferation of small cowboy ports around the country, many of them on the Humber. That is in total contrast to what has happened on the continent, where there has been a concentration on big, well-invested and highly capitalised ports, with a skilled and secure labour force often in shemes like this, which has led to a concentration of industry in ports such as Rotterdam, Le Havre, and Hamburg. We cannot equal that because we are developing a small, cut-price, cowboy industry, scattered in smaller ports around the country.

Secondly, the Government have not provided the support and backing to finance the ports and allow them to compete effectively. It is all very well to talk about abolishing the dock labour scheme and to make it the bogeyman, but the Government do not support the ports by financing the light dues, the pilotage, the Customs and the subsidies which are provided on the continent and which are particularly important to the fishing industry. I have visited continental ports and observed their fishing industry. Our fishing industry, particularly in Grimsby, has to pay quite heavy charges to ABP. On the continent, the ports are provided, almost in the way the roads are provided, as a form of municipal service or Government finance for the industry. Continental ports receive hidden financial support, so our fishing industry cannot compete with them, whatever the costs of landing the fish.

The arguments for abolishing the scheme do not add up. They have been totally distorted to focus everything on one hate object—the dock labour scheme. That is sanctioning an entirely unacceptable approach. The arguments in the White Paper are intellectually shoddy. It is monstrous that the White Paper uses arguments from a piece of research financed by the employers in the docks, claiming that abolition would create 50,000 jobs. That paper was specifically prepared for the employers and suits their interests, but it was presented almost as scientific evidence in the White Paper. That is a measure of the intellectual shoddiness of the Government's argument.

More important is the Government's total failure to consult. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) to argue that the TGWU said that it would not consult on the abolition of the scheme, but in negotiations one cannot expect one side to give away its case before entering the negotiations. The union will negotiate only on the ports and docks in general, and the Government themselves have refused to have any consultation on the wider issues. It is ridiculous for the Government then to say that Parliament must take precedence over negotiations. The Government are using Parliament as a legislative rubber stamp and the baying Conservative Back Benchers will troop through the Lobby in favour of an argument that they do not understand and vote for the Bill and then claim that it is not a matter for consultation. That is elective dictatorship in action—an elective dictatorship based on 42 per cent. of the vote.

There is a total contrast between the way, in which the Government are operating with regard to the dock labour scheme and what they are doing about the national barrister labour scheme, which will provide riches for life for a small bunch of financially motivated men and woman —5,000 all told. As soon as a posse of geriatric militants in a fit of senile dementia threaten to throw themselves under the wheels of the stagecoach as it drives to the jubilee next month, the Government immediately announce that they will extend the consultation period and trail the fact that there will be a softening of Government proposals.

The only logical explanation for that contrast is that the Government want a dock strike to conceal the disastrous mess that has already been made in the trade figures and the further rise in interest rates that is yet to come. It is like a repeat of "Beyond the Fringe"—"At this stage in the

class war, we need a futile gesture—let us provoke a strike and make the dockers the bogeyman." The Government want a hate object.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mitchell: No, I shall not give way.

The Government are in such a mess that they would like the trade figures obscured by a dock strike, but I hope that there will not be one. The dockers' leaders have acted very wisely in taking a proper legal approach on consultation and negotiation with the employers. I hope that the employers will negotiate seriously. They have a responsibility to negotiate on terms and conditions, the nature of the employment, the numbers and the manning levels when the scheme has ended. That is why the Government should delay the Bill until those consultations are concluded.

Finally, I wish to deal briefly with fish landings. There has been a particular problem in Grimsby, where there has been a decline in the fishing industry, not due to the lumpers being obliged to be dock workers, but to the shift of the fishing industry to Scotland and the decline in catches. There are 44 lumpers who are registered dock workers landing fish in Grimsby. There are not sufficient workers for the peaks of landings. There are too few for continuity and for the troughs of landings. That has been made worse by the Grimsby Fishing Vessel Owners, who have detoured landings elsewhere to other ports and taken legal action against the dock labour scheme to give themselves more latitude.

Those factors are understandable in some respects, but they have hardened the resistance of the lumpers in maintaining their conditions and not moving to productivity pay. They want a regular guaranteed income because the owners are detouring landings elsewhere and cutting the amount of fish that is handled by the lumpers. It is an inevitable human reaction. The lumpers have now voted, as the Government have cited, to get out of the scheme because they want to earn more by being outside the scheme. What the Government do not tell us—this presupposes the bankruptcy of the landing company—is that they want severance pay. It is thus possible as a tactical manoeuvre for the landing company, which is trading at a loss, to go bankrupt after the scheme has been abolished and the lumpers will not be reallocated to the register but will qualify for redundancy pay under the legislation.

That raises the question how they will be replaced. This is where the employers' argument that there will be no casual labour falls down. The Grimsby Fishing Vessel Owners have long wanted casual labour on a daily basis, and the dockers have allowed supplementary labour on a weekly basis. In Grimsby we really need a hard core of professional landers, who are highly paid and hard working, with some casual supplement. The owners seem to want an entirely casual landing force. I should like a guarantee that there will be no casual labour—the Government have echoed this today—to be extended to fish landing. Does it or does it not cover fish landing? That is what we want to know in Grimsby.

This situation could arise only in a class-divided country such as this where each side sees the other as its main problem. The employers want to cut expenditure on training and wages and cut down the labour force in the docks. That is no triumph for the industry—because the employers are seeking to triumph over their own workers. As a result—and the same will now happen in the docks—the 1980s have been the decade when management, employers and owners have triumphed over their own workers and lost out to the Germans and the Japanese.

8.31 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) spent much of his speech bemoaning the fact that goods are being taken to the south of England and shipped out to the continent through Felixstowe. I can tell the hon. Gentleman quite a bit about Felixstowe. It is a massive port just down the river from my constituency. Indeed a quarter of its work force lives in Ipswich. Its growth has been spectacular by any standards. A mere 30 years ago it was a totally insignificant port. By 1970, it was handling 2.25 million tonnes of cargo a year, by 1985 it was handling more than 10 million tonnes, and last year it handled 15,420,000 tonnes.

Geography and its proximity to Europe has played a part in its success, but it is not just that. I should like the hon. Member for Falkirk, East to consider why, when goods are taken south from Scotland, they go not to Tilbury, Southampton or other ports which have equal geographical advantages, but to Felixstowe. The key to the port's success has been that it has not been encumbered by the burden of restrictions, higher costs and poor industrial relations of the ports operating the national dock labour scheme.

I have a particular constituency interest in the Bill because not merely does a quarter of the work force of Felixstowe—the major non-scheme port—live in my constituency, but at the heart of my constituency is the port of Ipswich, which is a major container port in its own right and a scheme port. Ipswich provides a very interesting comparison. It too has expanded and prospered, although not to the same extent as Felixstowe.

It is not just geography that has helped Ipswich but the proximity of Felixstowe itself. The Ipswich dockers know that if the speed with which they turn round their ships compares too unfavourably with the dockers at Felixstowe, they will lose trade to Felixstowe. That has spurred Ipswich, under the able leadership of its chief executive John Evelyn, to become one of the most efficient and successful of the scheme ports.

The point—it is similar to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate)—is that, although Ipswich has been relatively successful, it has prospered despite the dock labour scheme. Absurdities such as ghosting and bobbing, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), have held it back and prevented it from being more successful still. Other scheme ports with less favourable geographical positions and industrial relations, and without the competitive stimulus of the proximity of a highly successful non-scheme port, have suffered disastrous declines.

The damage done by the dock labour scheme has been not merely to the scheme ports and their work forces but to the areas around them. It has held back the growth of ancillary services and industries which would have been drawn to a successful and expanding port. All too often

[Mr. Michael Irvine]

the scheme has produced an industrial wasteland around ports and compounded the economic difficulties of the towns and cities in which scheme ports are situated.

The damage goes deeper still because, through its inefficiencies and extra costs, the scheme imposes a levy on the consumer. It forces up the price of everything that comes through scheme ports, from food to cars.

Perhaps still more important is the damaging effect the scheme has upon our export trade. British exporters are hit twice. When they import raw materials, components or other intermediate goods through the scheme ports, they have to pay extra. When they import capital equipment through the scheme ports to improve their productivity, that pushes up costs too. They are hit yet again when they export through scheme ports. The scheme acts as a levy upon our consumers and a double levy upon our exporting firms.

The termination of the dock labour scheme will bring benefits all round. It will reduce costs, help our exporters and regenerate decayed and depressed areas around many of our scheme ports. Above all, it will enable managers to manage effectively.

The non-scheme ports have, in many respects, the best record of security of employment for their employees. For example, I give the employment record of the port of Felixstowe. In 1959 it employed just over 200 workers; by 1970 it employed 686; by 1980 it employed 1,340 and this year it is employing 2,030. That does not take full account of the extra employment and prosperity which the success of that port has generated around it.

The abolition of the dock labour scheme will bring benefits to consumers, exporters and the country as a whole and, in the long run, to the people who work in the ports.

8.38 pm

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): I listened with fascination to the Secretary of State. He told us the scheme was an abominable practice and something that everyone concerned with efficiency and the good of the country abhorred. If that is what he thinks—it is not what I think—why have the Government waited 10 years to act and why are they acting now? Why are we getting precipitate action now?

Two or three weeks ago, it was evident that, if the Government took precipitate action, there would be a fairly strong reaction from the dockers, given their history and their anxiety about casualisation. There was bound to be a risk of someone in the Transport and General Workers Union saying, "We shall have to strike against this measure." In those circumstances, it would have been sensible to include these propositions in a Green Paper to forewarn people of the Government's thinking and to engage in negotiations.

The argument advanced by the Secretary of State that he cannot negotiate with the union because it has taken a hard line until now is nonsense. Anyone who has been a Minister in the Department of Employment, given its knowledge and history, knows that it is perfectly reasonable to take a hard line before negotiating. The Government could have said that they intended to abolish the scheme and then entered into negotiations.

Dock workers in my constituency are extremely bitter about what is happening to them and their colleagues throughout the United Kingdom. They feel that they are being set up by the Government. They are extremely bitter about the accusations of inefficiency and of being a Luddite group who must be removed to advance the greater good of the community. Ministers and Tory Back Benchers run around the country preaching the success of the British economy. According to the White Paper, 60 per cent. of national income is accounted for by trade and 40 of the 75 ports that deal with that trade are scheme ports. It does not appear that the scheme has been a major impediment to the Government's successful economic policy.

Dockers in my constituency believe that the problem is that the flow of trade has been much too efficient. In their view, which I share, the true reason for precipitate action is that the Government are running into deep economic trouble. The fundamentals of the economy in 1989 are not terribly different from 1979. The inflation problem cannot be tackled adequately; the balance of payments deficit is running at historically high levels; the level of the pound and its management remain beyond the ability of the Chancellor and the Treasury; and unemployment remains a serious factor. Employers and economists from brokers in the City of London are saying that unemployment must rise to maintain balanced management of the economy.

It was noticeable this afternoon, when the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) suggested negotiations, that the Secretary of State took refuge in the fiction that the Bill is before Parliament. The hard fact of life is that the House is controlled by the Tory Government. There would be no problem if they wanted to withdraw or suspend the Bill and negotiate with the Transport and General Workers Union.

Like other hon. Members, I believe that the reason for the precipitate action is that the Government want a strike. The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) said that the Secretary of State does not want a strike. That may be true, but the lady in Downing street wants a strike. Last Tuesday, I listened carefully when the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) asked her about negotiations. In a dull Question Time, that was the moment when she came to light and became agitated and excited. She made it plain that negotiations were not on. She was for abolition and provocative action. It was evident from her body language and vibes that she wants a strike.

On 14 March 1989, the Government were saying, in a reply given by an Under-Secretary of State, that there was no intention of abolishing the scheme. On 20 March, a Green Paper was produced, "Removing barriers to Employment" concerned with "Barriers to Economic Efficiency", which dealt with 2·6 million people who are in the closed shop. If 2·6 million people in the closed shop are a substantial barrier to efficiency and industry, and the Government thought it sensible to act, but also to have a Green Paper and consultation, why are they jumping in with this Bill, which affects 9,000 dockers? There is no comparison between 9,000 and 2·6 million people, given that the Government argue that they are concerned mainly with economic efficiency. The Government are engineering what they hoped would be a strike and are playing political football with the lives of ordinary working men and their families for the sake of trying to wrong-foot the trade union movement and the Labour party.

The tragedy of the Government may seem manifest to many people today. There is substantial poverty and deprivation and a widening gap between rich and poor. Their final legacy will bring a much more sorrowful harvest, especially for business interests that have supported the Government in their advocacy and promotion of the ideology that market forces are all that matter. Currently, there is no doubt that casualisation is widespread. Part-time work is widespread, and scandalously low wages are being paid to young people, who are being abused. If there is a plentiful supply of labour and human beings are treated like any other commodity, under the market forces philosophy they can be exploited and abused.

That is no way to approach the problems of the 21st century. Western Europe is moving away from the metal-bashing era and entering one in which we shall have to use our minds and intellects to produce the services and products that will earn our living in the world. How we treat human beings—as living flesh and blood with ideas and concepts of fairness and justice—and whether we are prepared to enter a period of co-operation between people who employ and those who work will be determining factors in whether any part of the United Kingdom succeeds in the 21st century.

The Government are laying down the economic law of Milton Friedman and Professor Hayek; market forces alone matter. The Government must beware of the demographic factors of the next 20 or 30 years. If the Government's lesson to the working people is that they shall live by market forces, I am sorry, but so be it. As demographic factors change, the boot will move from the employers' foot to the workers' foot. There will be a shortage of young and skilled workers and the Government will beg middle-aged workers whom they have thrown on the scrap heap to return to work. If the Government treat us the way that they have for the past 10 years, and the way in which they want to for the next 10 years, and today they get their Bill, and they will insist on having their way in the market place at our expense. This is their day, but our day is coming.

8.48 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): This is a sad occasion. Conservative Members have had to listen to much pious claptrap and humbug from Labour Members and "Socialist national" party Members.

My constituency has the largest port in the United Kingdom—Tilbury—which has 1,054 registered dockers, probably the largest number of registered dockers in a single constituency. At the moment, those thousand men and their families are reflecting on the watershed which their industry is about to reach. They are reflecting on whether they may be asked to strike and, I hope, on whether they will take strike action which will undermine their long-term job security, or whether they will ignore the rantings of their Marxist shop stewards and the nonsensical advice given by Opposition Members, and go to work.

Those men may be confused. Certainly those who vote to strike will be confused about whether the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and his party will support them. If a substantial number of dockers in Tilbury vote against strike action, wish to carry on working, and come to me as their local Member of Parliament, they will have my support. If need be, I shall lead them across the picket line at Tilbury to ensure their right to work and to protect their jobs and the viability of Tilbury in the long term.

It has been mentioned in the debate that there has been investment in the docks, irrespective of the scheme. Yes, £8 million has been invested in the port of London but that is nowhere near enough and nowhere near as much as would have been invested if so much money had not been wasted on the overmanning in the ports, causing them to become uncompetitive. Tilbury suffers greatly from that—and it has totally undermined its position and its ability to compete against ports such as Rotterdam. That is why many customers have left and gone to Rotterdam.

The dock labour scheme hangs like a black cloud over Tilbury, where unemployment is double that of the rest of my constituency. The scheme completely prevents the port from becoming a viable job creation area.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) mentioned earlier, process work has been driven away. Instead of timber, which comes through the port of Tilbury, being turned into window frames and chairs at the dock, it is transported across the country to be turned into those products elsewhere because manufacturers do not want registered dock workers doing the work.

There was a recent specific example of a company that wished to locate a fresh fruit cold store at the port of Tilbury. The company wanted its own vessels to come in, the product to be unloaded and put in a cold store in Tilbury docks. However, the unions said there was no way that this would be allowed, unless the registered dock workers could then load the fresh fruit on to lorries to transport it to the company's customers in the United Kingdom. That job creation opportunity in Tilbury was lost and there are scores of other examples of that happening in the past.

Tonight we have also heard about jobs being lost in locations adjacent to the port. That is happening in the development area of Thurrock park, immediately adjacent to the docks. In a letter to me of 16 February, Graham Hall, property director of Port of London Properties, said under a sub-heading "Industrial Development":

> "One of the major difficulties that we have encountered is a resistance from many industrialists due to the continued presecence of the Dock Labour Scheme. There is an undoubted reluctance to establish premises close to the Port of Tilbury due to fears that work might be claimed by 'registered' dock workers. This factor can inhibit the range of uses that can be accommodated at Thurrock Park and also affect resale value of premises once built."

At Tilbury, ghosting and bobbing has been formalised. The management have to send home as many as 100 men a day because there is no work for them in the port. It is absolutely ridiculous for Opposition Members to suppose that any business can function or be efficient and profitable in such an environment. Not only are as many as 100 men sent home every day by the management, but many others spend the day carrying out activities, merely because they are present at the premises. Instead of the many sheds in the traditional cargo areas being swept once a week, they are swept endlessly every day. One can imagine how debilitating and demoralising that must be for the workers in that port.

Why do supporters of the trade union movement and the Socialist party, and members of the Socialist party support a mechanism and scheme which is completely elitist? No other working man or woman in the country

[Mr. Tim Janman]

has a job for life. Nor would they want such a scheme if they understood the ramifications of it and the effect that it has had on employment levels in the dock industry.

The Labour party will support strike action against the employers if there is a strike in the docks, but there is no professional party hack labour scheme being run at Labour party headquarters. Redundancy notices are not unknown at Walworth road. There are no jobs for life in the Labour party's headquarters, yet the party expects employers in the dock industry to run a jobs-for-life scheme. It is typical for the Labour party to be hypocritical and expect employers to employ under a scheme which they would never wish to prevail over themselves at Walworth road.

Labour party Members are hypocritical in presenting one face to the general public—saying that they would not restore the scheme if they formed another Government—while, to their paymasters in the trade union movement, they say that they will support strike action to retain the very scheme that they will not restore. The Labour party wants strike action, and wants to undermine the competitiveness of British ports and, therefore, the performance of the British economy. If a strike becomes a likely possibility, the Labour party and not the Conservative party will have fuelled the dispute.

The slogan of the new revisionist Labour party is "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change". The challenge here is whether, after repeated attempts to negotiate it away, the Government should end this absurd, outdated scheme and create positive change in the ports. The obvious answer is yes. However, as ever, the Opposition, in their normal cretinous and spineless way, shy away from supporting what is right.

The scheme is bad for Tilbury and, therefore, for Thurrock. It is bad for British ports and, therefore, for the British economy. It is bad for Great Britain and its abolition cannot come soon enough. Therefore, I shall vote with the Government tonight on behalf of my 1,000-plus registered dock workers.

8.58 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): I cannot think of a worse way to conduct industrial relations than this Bill, which is a textbook example of how not to act if the Government want harmony and industrial peace. However, do they? My only explanation for their action is that they are thirsting for, and intent on provoking, a strike, in order that the union's funds will be sequestrated by the courts.

On any other matter there would have been extensive consultations and a Green Paper. However, we were faced with a brutal announcement and a simultaneous White Paper, with the First Reading of the Bill the next day and an immediate Second Reading. Why has there been such indecent haste and why such a stampede? What is the emergency? After all, we are dealing with men's livelihoods and a vital industry. The men are not enemy aliens but our own people, and citizens who have given a lifetime of service to their industry. What a difference between the way they have been treated and the way in which the lawyers and judges have been treated.

Do the Government really want to celebrate the centenery of the great dock strike of 1889 by provoking another? I should have thought that Conservatives would have a sense of history. In that year, the dockers, without a union, worked and lived in pitiable conditions which almost defy description. They struck for 6d an hour—what John Burns called the

"full round orb of the docker's tanner"

and for 8d an hour overtime, and for a minimum of four hours a call, to give them 2s with which to feed, clothe and house their families. The strike lasted from 14 August to 18 September, and, with great public support, the dockers won their demands and formed their union.

This was four generations ago. Before Conservative Members snigger, they should remember that these memories remain strong in the docks communities. Until modern times, dock workers still had to endure and suffer the casual system under which men were hired and fired by the day by corrupt gangmasters who picked and chose the men. The men were treated without dignity in degrading circumstances, and fought each other like animals for work. All this is vividly remembered in the dock communities.

With the second world war came some enlightenment. The men were needed and their leader was Ernest Bevin, then known as the dockers' KC. He was brought into the war Cabinet by Winston Churchill as Minister of Labour and National Service. After the war, in the new Britain that our people had fought for, things were to be different. In 1946 and 1966, by Acts of statesmanship, progress and civilisation, the dock labour scheme was brought in to deal with the evil of casualisation and to introduce basic human rights at work. Since then, it has served us well.

Forty years after the introduction of the legislation, there is no reason why it should not be examined again, but it should be reviewed by negotiation, not diktat. Negotiations were offered tonight, but the offer was durned down.

I want to discuss some of the myths and stories that are being put about—first, the story that the dock labour scheme is bringing the ports to their knees. The largest employer is Associated British Ports. It made profits of £38 million in 1987, an increase of 46 per cent. on the previous year. In the first half of 1988 its profits increased by a further 59 per cent. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company's profits increased by 80 per cent. in 1987 over those of 1986. I see no great disaster there.

We have already heard about the cost burdens borne by British, compared with continental, ports. Other European countries have similar schemes, not a free-for-all. They also have job security arrangements, so this cannot be the reason for the disparity. Continental ports enjoy advantages because they are directly linked to the continent's transport infrastructure and they receive large subsidies from national and regional Governments. As we have heard, British shippers have to pay for lighthouse dues, pilotage and customer services, which are all onerous burdens. On the continent, these services are entirely free. We also have to pay for the costs of dredging and so on, unlike on the continent.

Another story put around is that there is a great surplus of labour. In 1987, of the 10,274 registered dock workers, an average of 8,717 were available for work on any day, and 8,009 were required on average. So the surplus runs in hundreds for the entire country, and the number has been reduced with every passing year.

The facts show that this is a pretended problem. There is no such thing as lifetime employment—40,000 jobs have

been lost. When the Select Committee visited Japan, we wanted to discover why the workers there were so co-operative when the employers introduced new technology. I was told that the secret was that Japanese companies offered lifetime employment. I said that I did not think that that idea would go down very well in the United Kingdom, but the diplomat who was with me told me that many people at home had lifetime employment —he had it, the civil service had it, the military had it and the judges had it. But the dock labour scheme does not give lifetime employment.

Industrial relations are important in this debate. In 1987, 0·64 days per person were lost through industrial disputes—just over half a day per person per year, which is better than many other industries. That means that the scheme has proved its worth; it is a price worth paying for good industrial relations.

The scheme has also facilitated a huge increase in productivity. The tonnage handled per person trebled between 1973 and 1987, and increased by 50 per cent. between 1983 and 1987 alone. Job security enlists the co-operation of the work force and leads to a huge increase in productivity.

We hear stories of excessive wages. In 1987, the average rate of pay for registered dock workers was £6·88 an hour, including overtime, bonuses and shift pay. The average hourly rate of pay for full-time males in Britain is £5·33, which is not an awful lot different. The scheme has brought job stability which, in turn, has brought industrial peace and huge increases in productivity. How much better all this is than what preceded it in the awful days when men were hired and fired by the day.

The Government should take this squalid Bill away and end their paranoid hatred of the trade unions. It is distasteful to see the juvenile ideologues on the Conservative Benches with their hatred of British trade unions. Like every other western European country, we should work in partnership with the trade unions and stop provoking industrial strife and confrontation. We should sit down now and negotiate a review of the dock labour scheme. A strike would be a deliberately engineered self-inflicted wound. If it happens, the fault will lie entirely with the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): We very much support——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Sorry, I call the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

9.8 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) has done enough damage.

This debate has reflected the serious division of opinion between the two sides of the House. I declare an interest as a seaman of 10 years experience—albeit serving gin and tonic as one or two hon. Members have pointed out. In the course of that experience, I visited almost all the major scheme and non-scheme ports, which gave me some understanding of the difficulties in the 1960s and 1970s and of the seeds of the problems in the industry, which go back a very long way. Suspicion lies at the heart of the difficulties—the problem of whether employers or the Government can be believed.

There are some areas of agreement. We agree that this is an important industry—the White Paper spells that out. Scheme and non-scheme ports make a major contribution to our balance of trade, balance of payments, exports and imports. All that is highlighted in the White Paper. It also highlights the trade switch that has taken place in the economy. Hon. Members who talked about Manchester and other ports did not take into account the major change away from the west coast in favour of the east coast. Technology has played its part and has contributed to the loss of trade in Manchester. The canal was not wide enough to take the new ships, and there was a move away from trade with Canada and America to trade with Europe.

We also recognise that our private and public ports are major public utilities. One of the first debates that I heard in the House was in 1971 on the Mersey docks and harbour board about which some of my hon. Friends spoke today and which was allowed to go bankrupt. The Government reconsidered their position and realised that the country needs major ports, scheme and non-scheme. I will deal with the subject of the Mersey docks and harbour board later because it set the scene for the whole approach and shows the difference in attitudes.

There has been a major problem in equating the capacity of our ports to the decline in trade. We have twice the capacity that is needed. How do we adjust the capacity to fit the trade? We all agree that it is out of balance and the argument is about cost differences. We have to go back some time to find the more contentious issues. It is said that everyone is against decasualisation, and that may be the case—if anything has died in the debate, it is the argument that somehow the scheme offered jobs for life. There have been many reductions in the labour force, which is now down to about 9,000.

Decasualisation came about because of inquiries and regulations and a desire for more efficient utilisation of labour. The Secretary of State for Transport should look at all the inquiries. Dozens of them were set up by Tory Governments to look at the nature and operation of the port industry and of the scheme. There were six inquiries in the 1950s. There was the major Rochdale report and the Devlin report in the 1960s. There was the Jones-Aldington report and the report by the National Ports Council which reported in the 1970s. They all agreed that decasualisation should be ended within the maintenance of a national dock labour scheme. They said that everything should be within the framework of a ports strategy and that we should have a national ports authority.

The analysis has been clear from the 1950s and it has been said that the scheme should be retained. There has been a great deal of criticism of the scheme in the House. I looked at the record of the Secretary of State because we joined in debate about earlier transport legislation. I looked at the pamphlet which gave him the job. It was called "The Right Track" and described as

> "A paper on Conservative Transport Policy by Norman Fowler."

It is dated 1977, and in it he said:

> "We agree with those in the ports industry who say that the immediate priority is one of stability."

That is correct. It goes on to say:

> "As Philip Chappell, the retiring Chairman of the National Ports Council, has said: 'The real problem for the United Kingdom ports today is not what more to build, but to get real value and throughput out of what we have'."

[Mr. John Prescott]

For a number of reasons, a later expansion took part in our ports. First, the Minister's predecessor—the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)—did away with capital controls in the name of greater competition. That led to a massive expansion, but also to problems because we had excessive capacity in some of our major traditional ports. At the same time, it increased the problems in the scheme ports. There was also expansion in the non-scheme ports. I shall return to that as it is a major economic issue.

When the Secretary of State first took office he wrote an article in *The Port* in which he said:

"Fowler's message—Do it Yourself".

At the annual luncheon of the National Association of Port Employers he is reported to have said:

"What the Government does not want to do is interfere in the way you are running your businesses."

The Bill certainly does not mean that the Government will stay out of the affairs of the industry. The Bill means active intervention.

Shortly after that, the Minister said that there would be no assistance and that matters would be left to the market. He then brought in the Port of London (Financial Assistance) Bill about which he said:

"Consequently, there has been a dramatic reduction in demand for labour in the ports. In London, for example, the number of registered dock workers has declined by over 70 per cent. since 1966—a fall from 25,000 to 6,500 in that period. I acknowledge the social and human impact that such a reduction involves, and I pay tribute to the co-operation that was necessary to secure it."—[*Official Report*, 16 April 1980; Vol. 982, c. 1305.]

At that time the Secretary of State was spending a great deal of money to maintain the Port of London authority, which was on the verge of bankruptcy because it did not have enough resources. He wanted to assist the national dock labour scheme in the process of reducing labour and brought the Bill to the House. That was intervention. It may have been a financial port policy—it meant running around spending money.

As the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) said in that debate, the Government were simply throwing money at the problem. One of the consequences for our ports authorities is that they have had to secure major amounts of money by means of levies that have been a burden on the industry. We must bear that in mind when we take account of costs in the industry. Industry has its labour costs and the costs of capital.

We told the Secretary of State when he presented the Port of London (Financial Assistance) Bill that he could not simply throw money at the problem. The Secretary of State said that it was a one-off job and would apply only to London. We said that soon enough it would have to apply to Merseyside, and within 12 months he was along with another bag of money to deal with the problems on Merseyside. We told him in the House and in Committee that he would have to give money to the other ports. What he was doing was bidding up the amounts of redundancy. That was his programme. The employers told him that if he continued his policy he would place on them a financial burden that would cause grave problems in future, and that is precisely what began to happen.

The Secretary of State's successor, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, presented a Bill to cover every port. That Bill allowed for £450 million-plus grants of £750 million. That burden was placed on the industry and the taxpayer because the Government had no ports policy and preferred to throw money at the problem—they did nothing to solve the problem, but they put people out of work. A ports policy could have been formulated for far less than the £750 million that the Government threw at the problem.

There is a feeling that the Government do not have a policy for the ports and that there is some sort of conspiracy between the employers and Government. The Minister said that national shippers support the Government's policy. Like most hon. Members, I received a statement today from the British Shippers Council. The statement made it clear that the shippers were against the dock labour board because they felt that the scheme was costly. I telegraphed the shippers this afternoon and asked, "Are you not concerned about the conference system that fixes the price for ships going from British ports? You face a penalty if you do not observe the conference line system." The spokesman for the shippers said, "We are against that." I asked "Are the costs not even greater?" and I was told, "Yes, they are." I asked, "Why are you not telling the Government to do something about the monopoly business of the shipping conference line system? The Secretary of State could do something about that if he was really interested in costs in the ports industry." But there was not a word from the shippers on that question. That, again, shows the identity of the employers with the owners.

The dockers do not believe the Government; they do not trust them. All sorts of inquiries have recommended the retention of the national dock labour scheme, but the Government are not even prepared to set up an inquiry or to enter any kind of discussion. They just want to exercise their own prejudice because they think that the scheme is wrong. As one of my hon. Friends said about the television technicians, the Government feel it must be wrong because we can all see it, but when there is an analysis of the matter by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the Government find their views rejected. That is why they did not dare to go to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission as they did with the television technicians. If it was a good idea to have an investigation into the television technicians, why is it not a good idea to have one for the dockers?

The evidence shows that the Secretary of State spends much time reading *Lloyd's List*. Perhaps it is his civil servants who do it and then give him quotes to read. The *Morning Star* also seems to be on his reading list. Why does he not pick up the telephone and talk to people, even if he does not like their views? He does not do that because the "Yes Ma'am" syndrome is at work. She told him to go out and do the job. She has told him that it does not matter what he said before. He should go out and do the job because she wants the dockers taken on because she is getting into an embarrassing economic situation. The economy is turning sour and the Prime Minister has said, "Is there a trade union body that we can begin to blame?" What other explanation can there be for the absence of discussions? The Government are taking away the rights of workers without any kind of discussion. They have never done that before—their intention has always either been placed in the manifesto or discussed with the workers concerned.

Let the Minister give one other example of where this has occurred. He was asked earlier for one, but no other

example has been given. All Governments of all political persuasions—until the present one—intended to do something about discussion and consultation, but that never occurred to the present Government. When Conservative Members worry about this being a conspiracy, perhaps they remember reading the pamphlet by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury in 1978, when he said that what we have to do is use the power of the state to take on the miners, the dockers, and so on.

That is precisely what the right hon. Gentleman spelled out in 1978—the same Secretary of State who at a ports lunch in 1984 made it absolutely clear that he agreed with the employers' claim made at that lunch. Actually, I attended the lunch—free or not. The employers said then they wanted to get rid of the scheme, and subsequently he confirmed that view. That is what made the dockers extremely suspicious about what was going on. Shortly after that, the national dock strike took place. Why was that? In my area of Immingham there was a breach of the law—*[Interruption.]* I remember the hon. Member for Immingham when he was the Member for Scunthorpe—he ran away from the constituency to find safer ground rather than fight the election. *[Interruption.]* Let me deal with this point.

I remember what the hon. Gentleman did when it was declared that there was to be a national strike because in Immingham there was a breach of the scheme—he said very clearly that there had been no breach of the scheme, and so did the Secretary of State, but the inquiry and the court found within a week that there had been a breach of the scheme. It was a deliberate breach, as we have seen around the country in this conspiracy.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): As the hon. Member for Immingham, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to a comment by Peter Broomhead, the union representative for Immingham:

"Dockers will be unlikely to join a national strike to save the scheme and expect to find themselves on picket lines. We are union men, but I am sure that most men here will carry on working."

Mr. Prescott: That gentleman was giving his views, and no doubt he believed what he was saying, but I am sure that he agrees that the agreement was discussed with the employers first. He will also see what the employers' promises that there will be no difference and no decasualisation actually mean. If they mean nothing and he is to be replaced by part-time labour, he may well change his view. Part-time labour is an issue even on Humberside. The Secretary of State talks about Hull and Grimsby, and says that in fishing Hull has been more efficient than in Grimsby—Hull being non-scheme for its bobbers—but the reason for its being less costly is that it has part-time, casual labour. That is the point that we are trying to make. Part-time workers have no employment rights and there are no national insurance or tax payments. That means that a system can be run more cheaply, but it is a casual labour system, putting people on and off the dole. There is no justification for that.

What we have seen in this campaign is what I call the dirty dozen—the dozen or so Members on the Government side who have been running this campaign in parliamentary questions, debates, pamphlets and private Bills—all of them seeking to get the Government to bring in the very legislation that they have introduced today. This is a Government who deny any kind of review and provide no consultation—unlike their attitude to the judges, as has been pointed out today—a Government who provide no inquiry to justify restrictive practices. Legislation is being rushed through as a matter of national urgency, and it affects 9,000 employees. This is a coincidence of mounting economic problems. It is the good old Thatcherite tactic—when in trouble pick a fight with a trade union. That is what we are beginning to see. The Government narrow the debate to expressions of extreme prejudice—"jobs for life", it is said, but the number has fallen from 80,000 to 9,000. Certainly no jobs are guaranteed for life. The facts show that that is not the case.

It is argued that the dockers support the scheme because it guarantees jobs for their sons. I had a considerable disagreement with my dockers in Hull because I thought it quite wrong that jobs should be guaranteed to sons in those circumstances. I think that jobs should be open. *[Interruption.]* Well, we had a public debate, and I told people in my area that I thought that the principle was wrong. It is a privilege that we see all too often among Conservative Members, and I am against it in those circumstances, too. The Secretary of State for Transport, who is to wind up for the Government, has the "Guinness" seat—I do not know what the official title is—and actually left university halfway through to take over the seat from his father, so I will take no lectures from the Secretary of State for Transport about sons taking fathers' jobs.

In this debate there has been a lot of talk about bobbing, welting and ghosting. In the House of Commons it is called "pairing". If hon Members look at the record, they will see that I do not pair with any Tory. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman) has just come in. The Government have a common pool system. Members record their votes but when the Government do not need so many workers—in this case, Members of Parliament—they are given the day off. It is called a bisque here. On the docks they call it ghosting and there is very little of it. Here, Members get their full pay—they can even go out and earn money from a second job. A docker cannot do that. When people in this House talk about bobbing, welting and ghosting, dockers regard that as having double standards.

It has been said in this debate that the system is an anachronism. Is it anachronistic to have a system which gives training far better than any other industry, welfare and an occupational medical health scheme far better than in any other industry, safety conditions and safety training far better than in any other industry, medical welfare, with doctors and nurses? Surely those and the conditions that we want all industries to have. Do not Conservative Members believe in levelling up rather than levelling down? I have heard those arguments from them for so many years, so why do we not level up to the safe standards, good medical provision and training that I have described? We cannot get that from the private sector, and one does not get it from the non-scheme sector either. Yet those are the conditions that the Government repaid as anachronistic.

What is the real difficulty? What is the dispute between us? What hon. Members opposite do not like is having working people participate in decision-making about their jobs, about redundancies, about the future of the industry.

[Mr. Prescott]

That is what sticks in the craw. These rights are embodied in law. That sticks in the throat, too. When an employer want to exercise his right to get rid of people, he can be accused of not obeying the law. The Government do not like that either, so, as in the case of trade union legislation, they change the law and get the judges to carry out their philosophy.

Will dismissal be the same under the employment protection legislation that has been talked about? We know that of the many thousands of workers—the number is growing all the time—found to have been dismissed unfairly, only 4 per cent. are ever returned to their jobs. Will the right be the same in this case? In this case workers cannot be sacked easily. They cannot be dismissed without justification being given. Apparently, that is a point of complaint. There will be no rights under the unfair dismissal legislation.

I wish to deal with another matter at the heart of this scheme. In the past few years many employers have been getting rid of trade union activists. They are quite prepared to be accused of unfair dismissal and to pay the pittance of compensation that is offered under the unfair dismissal legislation. That does not happen under the dock labour scheme. Is not the scheme about justice and the right to be treated fairly?

The real issue is cost. The Government say that the scheme costs £770 million. Most of those costs resulted from the Government's policy. They lent the money to pay for the redundancies and the necessary loans. In 1971, the Government intervened in the policy of the bankrupt Mersey docks and harbour board. The Secretary of State at the time said that the inefficiencies of that board were a result of the fact that the ship owners and the users of the port dominated the board, with two thirds control, and refused to increase prices. That led to a major problem and the collapse of the board.

A private Member's Bill was introduced to help to return the savings of widows who had invested in what they thought was a good bet on a trusted port, but two hon. Members intervened to prevent such help—those two are now Secretaries of State for Employment and for Transport. They intervened to help the shareholders, but they would not intervene to help the interests of the employees. That is a matter of record and contrast.

The port of Hull has been mentioned today. I looked at the problems there in the 1970s when there were major strikes, and millions of tonnes of traffic were diverted from the Hull port down the river. That was because Hull used to deal with cargo from Rotterdam which was then transhipped in barges down the river. When the new container system came about, with major changes in technology and trade, the trade concentrated in Rotterdam and small ships picked up the cargo in Rotterdam and took it down the wharves. The Government now say that it is cheaper to go down the wharves. That is true, but the reasons should be examined. Hon. Members need not accept my word for it—they can look at the reports of the inquiry set up by the Government into the National Ports Council, which show that the capital costs of a major port having to provide for containerisation and major cargoes on big ships, and the whole range of facilities that are required in a modern port that a small wharf does not need, requires the big port to spend three times as much capital as the small wharf against the earning assets. Therefore, they have a financial penalty and cannot charge the same prices.

In Hull, the British Transport docks board at that time adopted inflation accounting, which meant that it charged extra in a way that no private sector or non-scheme port could. It then decided to cut down the size of some of the ports and close some of the wharves in Hull. That is the reason for the heavy financial burden. Those are the reasons. Anybody making a choice between a traditional port and a wharf faced such problems.

The Touche Ross report looking into European ports, to which the Secretary of State referred, had an analysis showing that in European ports, the police, the rates and the infrastructure are carried. A later study by the National Westminster bank showed exactly the same. If we had the same way of financing, our charges would be 40 to 50 per cent. lower. That makes the labour cost pale into insignificance. The levy imposed on the industry to pay for medical assistance, training and running the system is approximately £4 million or 2·5 per cent. of the wage bill. The charge for maintaining and servicing the redundancy and financial package that the Government forced on the industry was £12 million or 7 per cent. of the wage bill—a burden three times as heavy as that of the labour scheme and not imposed on non-scheme ports.

Once again, in this Bill, the Government are to give more money—the same Government who constantly accuse us of wishing to throw money at problems. Here they are putting a financial straitjacket on the scheme ports and then asking us to compare their charges with those of the non-scheme ports and see how one is increasing at the expense of the other.

All these problems show that the dock labour scheme cannot be dealt with unless we look at the ports policy. Throwing money at the problem, as the Government have done, is not the way to deal with it. They have done nobody any favours—dockers or taxpayers. The Government have not looked at the problems of the ports or understood the differentials between small and large ports, whether they be capital or labour costs. They have not looked at the problem of how much port capacity we need. Those matters were spelled out five, 10 or 20 years ago in various reports on the industry. That is why we believe that the labour scheme has to be seen within a ports policy. The Government have been creating major financial problems for the industry, and have rejected a national ports authority.

When he came to his job, the Secretary of State proudly introduced a Bill to get rid of the National Ports Council, which had no teeth. He had already received a report from it saying that a national ports authority—one body to deal with capital development in the industry—was necessary, but he rejected that advice. That is why our election manifesto made it clear—it was spelt out further in the "Fresh Directions" written by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes)—that we believe that a port and labour policy should be developed in an overall strategy for our ports to deal with excess capacity, greater safety and the differential in cost between Europe and ourselves. We also promised to

"review the operation of the Dock Labour Scheme."

We fought the general election on that policy because we believe that it is right.

The Government are using the power of the state to get rid of workers' rights. They are not just attacking the

dockers. They introduced a Bill to abolish the wages councils, which affected millions of people in low-paid work. They reduced, and then got rid of, trade union rights at GCHQ. They vetoed the participation in decision-making that every other European country has under the Vredeling proposal. They want no rights for workers, and they have embarked upon a programme to reduce and then to eliminate those rights. They are using trade union legislation to achieve that.

The Bill has nothing to do with a ports policy or the national interest, and nothing to do with employment rights or justice for workers, but everything to do with the Government's economic record, which is not being exposed. It has everything to do with the political spite and prejudice of a Government determined to secure a strike. There has been no consultation. The Labour party will do all that it can to resist such an injustice. We believe that the Bill will be damaging to the ports industry and will bring a return to casual working. We shall resist the Bill, and we shall begin that resistance by voting against its Second Reading today.

9.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) began his speech by outlining the areas of agreement that exist between us, few though they may have turned out to be. I shall do the same before turning to the areas of disagreement that lie between us. I wish to say at the beginning of my remarks, however, that it is a pity that more hon. Members have not been able to contribute to the debate. The Front Bench replies could have started a little later. I am sorry that my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) tried to participate in the debate and did not have the chance to do so.—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says, "Keep them out." That is perfectly clear. That is what he said—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I recognise that you have just assumed the Chair and that you are rightly calling for order during the Secretary of State's speech. Those of us who entered the Chamber shortly after 9 o'clock heard the mass of interruptions that were created from a sedentary position by Conservative Members. We are waiting for fair play and nice manners.

Mr. Speaker: Let us have order now.

Mr. Channon: I shall turn to the areas of agreement in the futile attempt, perhaps, to try to lower the temperature in the House at least for a few moments.

I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East that the ports constitute a crucial and important industry. I welcome his support for the excellent pamphlet which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment produced in 1977, which was entitled, "The Right Track". I do not think that my right hon. Friend expected it to be commended so strongly by the hon. Gentleman. One of the most extraordinary assertions that I have heard from an Opposition spokesman for some time was when the hon. Gentleman accused my right hon. Friend of committing the cardinal sin of throwing money at the ports industry. That is a curious charge for a Labour spokesman to make against one of my right hon. Friends.

The other curious accusation to be made against the Government is that the Bill has been rushed through. It is said that it has been rushed through after 10 years of Conservative Government. Many of my hon. Friends wish that it had been introduced far sooner. To say, after 10 years of Conservative government, that the Bill has been rushed through is to indulge in fantasy.

Mr. Leighton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Channon: I shall press on for a while and then I shall give way. I have not reached any of the main issues yet. I shall, of course, give way to the hon. Gentleman.

We have had a lively debate and I suspect that it will continue being lively. It has brought out many of the misconceptions of Opposition Members about the future of the ports industry once the scheme has been abolished. If, as has been argued, the retention of the scheme is vital for the future of the scheme ports and the dockers working in them, why is it that the non-scheme ports have all been doing so well? Why is it that the non-scheme ports have all enjoyed a significant expansion of trade while the scheme ports have seen their share of United Kingdom trade steadily declining?

If the scheme is so important to the employment conditions of dockers, why is it that non-scheme ports have had no difficulty in recruiting an increasing number of dock workers, while the number of dockers in scheme ports continues to fall? I hope that I can make it clear during my speech, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment did in his speech, in company with many of my hon. Friends during the course of the debate, that if we are to consider seriously the future prosperity of our ports industry and of all the employees involved in it, it is essential that the scheme be abolished.

We have heard repeated claims from Opposition Members that abolition of the scheme will lead to a return to casualism. No hon. Member want to see a return to the 1930s or to the early post-war years when dockers were treated in the way that has been described. No hon. Member has argued for that, either tonight or earlier. We understand what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) and other hon. Members have said this evening, but they have failed to explain why the abolition of the scheme would mean a return to those days. The truth is that it will not. On 6 April Sir Keith Stuart, the chairman of Associated British Ports, said:

"ABP does not intend to introduce a casual labour system".

On 11 May Mr. Furlong, the managing director of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company—another big employer of registered dock workers—stated:

"Whatever challenges and tests may face the Port of Liverpool after abolition, there will be no return to the casual employment from which the scheme originally sprang".

Mr. Leighton: Will the Secretary of State please tell the House why, after 10 years, there is the present stampede? Why was there a ministerial statement and a White Paper on the same day, with the First Reading on the following day and this immediate Second Reading? Can the Secretary of State see a difference between the treatment of the dockers and that given to that other closed shop of lawyers, for the reform of which there was a Green Paper,

[Mr. Leighton]

a long period of consultation in which they may take industrial action and another four months of consultation? Why has there been no consultation on this Bill?

Mr. Channon: Now that the Government have come to this conclusion, which I hope will be supported by the House, it is in everybody's interests, whatever their job in the ports, be they registered dock workers or anything else, that the period of uncertainty should be ended as quickly as possible. It is only right that this Bill should have been brought forward and that it should proceed in the normal way following the appropriate interval and the announcement some time ago by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. It is only right that the Bill should proceed in an orderly way through the House. I am sure that that is in the interests of all concerned.

To continue the point on casualism, on 13 April employers in ports representing over 90 per cent. of registered dock workers said that there would be no return to casual employment.

Mr. Sillars *rose*——

Mr. Channon: If I have time I shall give way a little later, but I have a lot to say.

My hon. Friends the Members for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Woodcock) have shown how, over the past 20 years, scheme ports have seen a dramatic fall in their share of traffic. Non-oil traffic fell from 90 per cent. to 70 per cent. London used to handle 21 per cent. of non-oil traffic in 1970, but by 1987 that proportion had fallen to 13 per cent. Liverpool's share has been sliced from 11 per cent. to 3 per cent. whereas in contrast Felixstowe now handles seven times as much traffic as it did 20 years ago. It now handles——

Mr. Loyden: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Channon: I shall give way later on, but I must get on.

Felixstowe now handles 6 per cent. of the United Kingdom's traffic, compared with 1 per cent. in 1970. Felixstowe is by no means the only success story among the non-scheme ports. The private wharves of the Hull, Humber, Trent and Ouse have doubled their traffic in the past 10 years, despite the close proximity of the better situated, deep-sea ports of Hull, Grimsby and Immingham.

The small port of Neath which, unlike the rest of the ports in south Wales is outside the scheme, has seen a threefold increase in its non-oil traffic since 1975, whereas the other ports in the area, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Port Talbot all lost traffic in that period.

The whole House knows about the dramatic changes that have taken place at Dover, our No. 1 ferry port and a non-scheme port. It now handles 5 per cent. of the United Kingdom's non-oil traffic, by tonnage—a fivefold increase on 197-0. Of course, that is related to the success of the ro-ro ferries, but that level of growth in traffic would never have happened if Dover had been in the scheme.

Further up the Kent coast, non-scheme Ramsgate has also benefited. It handled 1·6 million tonnes in 1987 whereas 20 years ago it handled only 50,000 tonnes. Again, that is evidence of the growth that can be achieved outside the dock labour scheme.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Secretary of State accept that the reason why non-scheme, deep-water ports are doing so well is that they are better located to serve the existing pattern of trade than are scheme ports? Does he not agree that ports such as Liverpool that were dependent on the American trade are now disadvantaged because of changing trade patterns that have nothing to do with scheme or non-scheme ports?

Mr. Channon: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. He is right to draw attention to the shift of trade from the west coast to the east coast. However, there are non-scheme ports both on the west and the east coasts. If one takes them as a whole—and I cited a south Wales port a moment ago—the growth of trade at the non-scheme ports as against scheme ports can clearly be seen. That is not a coincidence. I am sure that the House and people outside recognise that the dock labour scheme has been a major force in holding back the development of the scheme ports.

Mr. Harry Ewing: I am sorry to interrupt the flow of the right hon. Gentleman's speech but I must ask him a simple question. Both he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment placed great emphasis on the word of the port employers that they will not return to using casual labour. Will the Secretary of State give a guarantee at the Dispatch Box that, if their word is broken, the Government will introduce legislation to take care of the situation?

Mr. Channon: I will not give that guarantee at the Dispatch Box, and nor would any right hon. or hon. Member expect me to do so. The House will have to form a judgment on the value of that particular assurance, which I personally believe to be extremely valid. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. After all, we can see how little casual work there is in the ports at present. The idea that this is some wicked plot to get rid of the dock labour scheme and to reintroduce casualisation by the back door is not borne out by the fact that there is so little casual work in dock labour scheme ports at present.

Mr. Prescott: That is because the scheme stops it.

Mr. Channon: I was describing what is happening in non-scheme ports, as the hon. Gentleman would know if he did me the courtesy of listening.

Mr. Prescott: No, the right hon. Gentleman was talking about scheme ports.

Mr. Channon: I want to address the crucial issue of what will happen to our ports—a point that was raised by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East in his speech. It is essential to carry on the policy in the ports industry, as in other fields of transport, of deregulation and of liberalisation, so that the ports may be in a position to operate as fully commercial enterprises in a competitive world. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) spoke about marine pilotage and about light dues. We have undertaken a major reform of marine pilotage, sweeping away the old statutory regime and replacing it with a streamlined, cost-effective one. We pressed for greater cost-effectiveness in lights and navigational aids.

This year, I announced the first major reform this century in the structure of light dues, including the ending of dues on deck cargoes and the reduction of light dues. They

were implemented from the beginning of this month as the latest step in a cumulative reduction in light dues over the past eight years amounting to over 40 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: But now they have been imposed on fishing vessels.

Mr. Prescott: A number of my hon. Friends made the point that those charges, together with many others such as those for rates, police and infrastructure, are not carried by European ports, and that makes a difference of 50 per cent. between the costs of United Kingdom ports and those of Europe. All the Secretary of State has done is to impose those costs instead on shipowners or on the ports themselves.

Mr. Channon: If I have time, I shall deal with the whole question of costs.

The Bill is in accord with our approach to transport in general.

Mr. Prescott: Yes, it is a disaster.

Mr. Channon: It is a vital piece of reform. The dock labour scheme has inhibited the release of the potential of far too many of our great ports. The scheme applies in the most part to the country's traditional main ports, many of which have a long history. It was no accident that they were sited where they are. They were built and developed to serve our main centres of industry and population, where the deepest or most sheltered waters were to be found, and major industries grew up alongside them. Many of them enjoy, through rail or road links, first-class communications with other parts of the country.

Hull, Immingham, Liverpool, Bristol, Ipswich are among many scheme ports whose prospects have been enhanced by improvements to the road network. If we cannot release the energy of those scheme ports so that they can expand and develop their full potential we are misusing, indeed wasting, a great national resource. We must give our scheme ports the same unrestricted freedom to compete, develop and expand as is enjoyed by those outside the scheme.

My hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) described the handicaps that existed in the past, and are still in existence in the scheme ports. Last week the Leader of the Opposition claimed that scheme ports had had exactly the same increase in traffic as non-scheme ports, and a faster rate of growth. If the position is viewed over a short time span that may be possible, but what matters is the pattern over a longish period.

Since 1970 the tonnage of non-oil cargo handled in scheme ports has increased by 10 per cent., while the growth in non-scheme ports has been 334 per cent. Of course it is a much lower base line in non-scheme ports, but over the same period, if the actual rather than the percentage increase in tonnage handled is taken into consideration, scheme ports have increased their non-oil cargo by about 10 million tonnes, while in non-scheme ports the figure is no less than 40 million tonnes. However, we look at it, the plain fact is that for the past 20 years or more scheme ports have been losing market share—yet among them are some of the best-sited and best-linked ports in the country.

It is not only the non-scheme ports with which our scheme ports must compete; we must look forwards as well as backwards. My hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) talked about the challenge of 1992. Key competition will come from two quarters. The creation of a single European market will stimulate trade between the Community and other countries as well as between countries within the Community, and we can expect trade with distant continents to be handled in big ships that call at one port, or at most two, in north-west Europe. Their cargoes will be brought to or taken from the port on feeder services, whether by ship, rail or road.

If our ports are to compete for that deep-sea trade with Rotterdam, Antwerp, Zeebrugge and the other big continental ports, they must improve their efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Felixstowe is already competing, but we must put Southampton, Tilbury, Hull and Liverpool into the market as well. They must be freed from the cost restrictions—and, indeed, the reputation—with which they have been burdened through being in the dock labour scheme.

It is a sobering thought that 20 per cent. of our exports to, and imports from, continents other than Europe is shipped through Antwerp and Rotterdam, and we must try to change that. I want a large slice of that 9·5 million tonnes or so of cargo to come from British ports, but there will be no chance of it—indeed, I believe that matters will get worse—if the scheme stays in place. The big continental ports are among the most efficient in the world: they are doing well, and we must give our ports every chance to compete.

I believe that the Channel tunnel, a completely novel kind of competitor, will generate more trade between Britain and continental Europe, but it will also compete for some of the traffic that at present goes by sea through our ports. It is crucial for the future prosperity of those ports that they do not have to compete with one hand chained behind their back to the dock labour scheme.

What is crucial for the ports is also important for the country as a whole. The more efficient and cost-effective are our transport links with our continental partners—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members to listen to the Secretary of State and to stop these private conversations.

Mr. Channon: It is clear from today's debate that the case for the removal of the dock labour scheme is unchallengeable. It has scarcely been challenged, either inside or outside the House. I note that neither the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East nor the hon. Member for Oldham, West said whether they would restore the scheme; it is very curious that we have not been told that.

The Government believe that in the circumstances in which we find ourselves it is appropriate to provide fair and generous compensation arrangements for former registered dock workers. Without it, if made redundant, they would be entitled to no more than the normal statutory redundancy pay. Hitherto, dockers who volunteered for redundancy received much larger sums. Under the new compensation scheme, up to £35,000 will be available to any registered dock workers who are made redundant within the first 18 months after Royal Assent, subject to age and length of service, and up to £20,000 for the second 18 months. No hon. Member can fairly argue that those are not reasonable terms for us to offer to registered dock workers.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is the Secretary of State able to say why it is necessary to introduce the Bill now with such speed? If he says that there is to be a tremendous expansion of jobs in the docks industry, why is he laying aside £13 million to pay for redundancies?

Mr. Channon: I have already explained to the House, and I think that the majority of hon. Members agree with me, that, if anything, reform is long overdue rather than being too soon.

The inefficiencies that have been so amply displayed and that are set out in the Government's White Paper show only too clearly the handicap that so many of our ports suffer because of the dock labour scheme. I ask the House again to note an extraordinary feature of the debate. Neither the hon. Member for Oldham, West nor the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has answered the simple question that has been put to them time and again: will the Labour party reintroduce the scheme, should it regain office? Will it, or will it not? I ask the House and the country to note that——

Mr. Prescott: We have made it absolutely clear, as we did in our election manifesto, that we want the right to participate in action against unfair dismissal to be given to the workers. We believe in levelling up. Therefore, when we next come to power, the dock labour scheme will be considered within the context of a transport policy and a ports policy that gives employment rights to workers.

Mr. Channon: The House will draw its own conclusions from that elaborate reply. I think that what the hon. Gentleman means is no, but I do not think he will say that. Why did the hon. Member for Oldham, West say on radio that Labour would support the dockers if they came out on strike? Is that still the Labour party's position? It is extremely unclear. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will now get up and say whether he intends to support the dockers if they come out on strike. I shall give way to him, too. Will he answer that question? No, he does not intend to answer it. The Opposition are frightened to tell the country the truth.

Finally, do the Opposition still stand by their 1976 attempt not only to strengthen the dock labour scheme but to extend it still further? Some hon. Members would vote that down. They look very unhappy; they know that the Labour party supports an unacceptable scheme. The Opposition spokesman will not answer my questions.

What does the Labour party have to hide? Why will it not tell the electorate? I thought that the Labour party was in favour of open opposition as well as open government. It is clear that we are not to be given an answer.

At the time when the Labour party is telling the electorate that it has been born again, it is ironic that it should choose to back yet another loser. What we object to is when it tries to take the country with it. The hon. Member for Oldham, West condemned the abolition of the scheme because it could lead to industrial action that would damage the economy, yet he supports just such a strike. Nothing could show more clearly what the Labour leadership thinks about the economy of the country and its priorities.

There has been a catalogue of disasters in the constituency of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. A company proposed a new steel terminal in Hull. Thanks to the dock labour scheme, it pulled out and 250,000 tonnes of cargo a year disappeared from Hull. The Hull container terminal was closed after Geest pulled out after eight years, because of continual industrial action. As the United Kingdom director of Geest said,

"The people of Hull will have a right to ask, why are we again allowing stupidity to rule?"

That is what the hon. Member for Oldham, West supports.

The Labour party continues to support this ridiculous dock scheme. Everyone knows that it should be abolished and I ask my hon. Friends to join me in voting for the Bill.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 195.

Division No. 158] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*

Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul

Neilist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Martyn Jones and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

DOCK WORK BILL [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Dock Work Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the extinguishment of liabilities of the National Dock Labour Board to the Secretary of State in respect of loans made under section 3(3) of the Dock Work Regulation Act 1976 or section 4 of the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act 1946;

(b) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the provisions of the Act.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Housing (Change of Landlord)

10.14 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Housing (Change of Landlord) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 367), dated 6th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th March, be annulled.

This statutory instrument, which is unusually large, is the sort of legislation to which we are becoming accustomed under a Government who legislate by statutory instrument or order of the Secretary of State, as we pointed out to the Minister a number of times in Committee during consideration of the Housing Act 1988.

I concede that the regulations make one or two changes for the better. The Government have clearly responded to some of the requests that we made in the Committee that considered the Housing Act. I welcome those small improvements. We still have a system, which the Government introduced, of "pick a landlord", which should more appropriately be named "pick a tenant". The regulations refer to the way in which, having made a bid for a group of properties, the applicant—as the new landlord will be called—can begin to acquire those properties and the information that must be given by the local authority about the tenants who live in the area, voting and consultation periods.

It would be nice if I were able to say that this is a genuine "pick a landlord" scheme that would enable the tenant of a latter-day Mr. Rachman or Mr. Hoogstraten to go to his town hall, housing association or local housing co-operative and say, "I am fed up with being harrassed by this landlord and want to change to a better or different one." That will not occur. The regulations apply only to local authority tenants.

The Government allege that local authority housing is unpopular. That is a strange argument when one bears in mind the fact that local authority waiting lists of people desperate to obtain council houses have increased dramatically under the Government and currently stand at 1·25 million people. The Government's view was soundly put down by the Glasgow university study carried out at the request of the Department of the Environment. It showed that, by and large, councils are good landlords and compare favourably with housing associations.

The regulations are a one-way ticket because there is no possibility of changing one's mind if one gets a bad landlord. Again, it is not "pick a landlord" but "pick a tenant". An outside landlord makes a bid, and once it is accepted tenants are stuck with him until the landlord chooses to dispose of them. Tenants are unable to vote to change their landlord.

The object of the measure is to squeeze the public housing system further, to push people out of it and into the public sector. Perhaps predictably, that policy is not working as well as the Government would like. The harsh reality for the Government is that the majority of tenants who are voting under the rigged system, whereby abstentions are counted as yes votes—a system that would be satisfactory to a third-rate dictator—are voting it down and saying no. Some of the alternative landlords have been quite good housing associations with good reputations. Tenants are doing so because the Government have terrified many of them, especially older ones, with their drive to push them into the private sector.

Many tenants, especially older ones, remember that they tried to get out of the private sector. Government reports clearly show that private rented housing is the most unpopular form of rented housing. Some council landlords and some housing association landlords are bad, but the worst of them cannot compare with the worst private sector landlords, which include the Mr. Rachmans and Mr. Hoogstratens of this world. When the Government say that such things cannot happen and—as they tried to tell us during the passage of the Bill—that landlords will not exploit the new assured tenancy that makes it easier to evict, I demonstrated how wrong they are.

The new business expansion scheme pushes people who have never been landlords into providing accommodation. Brochures from companies—some quite respectable—are circulated which say that the companies will convert the properties into three and four-bedroom residential flats, let them on an assured tenancy, and shortly before the end of the business expansion scheme takes effect—the five-year period when tax is paid—they will convert them into one-bedroom flats, prior to selling them. The brochure continues:

"Carrying out major renovation work on such accommodation is grounds for compulsory repossession"—

the nasty word "eviction" is not used—

"under the 1988 Housing Act."

That was how I was able to predict—sadly, with accuracy—that such legislation and the assured tenancy would be abused. The evidence is there to see for all who have eyes.

Another reason why the Government's system is failing is that housing associations object to being used as the stalking horse for the Government. They do not like being pushed into taking over council properties because they are aware that, if they do so, they will take on large management problems which, in many cases, they are not equipped to meet. The Government, in their desperation to increase the supply of housing, are asking them to start building more of their own properties, and their management problems become even more complicated. The associations have to increase the supply of built properties and take on other existing properties from local authorities. The majority of housing associations do not want to get into that game. Only the bigger, richer and longer-established councils can do so, which is what is happening.

Part V of the regulations relates to section 101 of the Housing Act and prevents local authorities from making secure a tenancy on a property which becomes vacant during the application. From time to time the Government have accused councils of keeping properties empty unnecess-arily. I have pointed out time and again that local authorities have a better record in this matter than housing associations or the private sector, and an infinitely better record than the worst of all landlords, the Government, of whose properties almost 6 per cent. are empty.

Under the regulations, local authorities will have to keep additional numbers of houses and flats empty because they cannot let them during the period of the takeover—which can last for six months—unless they do so on a temporary basis. The properties cannot be let on a secure tenancy.

How can the Minister justify this in terms of good housing management? How can a local authority manage its stock well if, during the period of a takeover, it cannot let properties which become vacant—even to people who are homeless? The local authority may still have to put such people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation even though empty property exists in the takeover area. I challenge the Government to say that they will allow local authorities to put people into vacant properties and give them a secure tenure and a vote.

Regulation 13 does not allow a tenancy to become secure automatically when section 101 of the 1988 Act ceases to apply. Will the Minister address this topic when he winds up? Why cannot the property automatically become a secure tenancy? The right and logical thing to do would be to allow it to revert to being a secured tenancy. Under section 13, that would not happen—but if I am wrong, I will be glad to be corrected.

Schedule 3 says that the information

"shall be written in clear and straightforward language".

I welcome that; it is a good change, but I hope that it will not be the so-called straight language of the Government's propaganda leaflets, such as the so-called "Tenants' Choice" leaflet put out by the Department of the Environment, which did not state in clear and unambiguous language that people who do not vote are counted as having voted in favour of a new landlord. That was rightly described as inertia selling by the National Consumers Council. The Minister continually ducked giving the council the leaflet so that it could give its informed view on the matter.

I welcome the fact that the new landlord will have to specify the difference between a new tenancy on offer and a secured tenancy. That is one of the most interesting and welcome moves in this otherwise squalid little regulation. For some time now, tenants have been offered a pig in a poke, often by organisations that have been well-intentioned. I have seen leaflets put out by people seeking to take over—I am thinking in one case of a management buy-out which implied that the tenancies that tenants would get if they voted for new landlords would be as good as secured tenancies. They might have been, but nobody knows, because no agreement of any sort was in existence when the propaganda was being put out. Tenants were being asked to make decisions without knowing the facts. So it is an important and welcome step forward that tenants should be told the specific difference between the new tenancy they are being offered and their present secured tenancy. If they are offered an assured tenancy, it will be much weaker than their present secured tenancy, because, as I have already said, people can be evicted on the grounds of the necessity for major repairs or of being more than three months in arrears with their rent.

I hope that the Government, who abuse the English language regularly, will tell tenants in straight language that they cannot change their minds. I hope they will tell them that, if they vote for a new landlord who turns out to be bad, all that the Government will do will be to tell the landlord that he cannot be an assured landlord any more—but his tenants will have to stay with him. They will not be able to vote on the matter—no "pick your landlord" this time. This is a one-way ticket, often into an unknown future. That is why so many elderly people are frightened about the change. The Government are bullying them into the private sector, and that is unacceptable and unnecessary.

Section 16(6) suggests that it is the tenants' duty to tell applicants that they may be absent from their address for some time—an interesting innovation. It means that, if a

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tenant goes off to serve in the armed forces—perhaps to the Falklands—for a long time, unless he remembers to tell the applicant that he will be away for a long time, he will return to find that ownership of his home has been transferred over his head. People who go to prison or to hospital or who become seriously ill at home and who cannot care for their affairs in the usual way will also be vulnerable in this respect.

This is not a proper democratic system: it is a disgrace. I have yet to meet a Conservative Member of Parliament who has been able to justify this appalling system on a public platform. I have to hand it to the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) who, speaking at a meeting with me, put the Government's case perfectly. He said that they choose the electoral system that suits the occasion, and by God he was right. He said, "As long as we can win it, we shall fix it in whatever way we can." What a definition of democracy. What a definition of what we think is necessary in a modern democratic society.

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Leeds, North-East): The hon. Gentleman has taken totally out of context what I said at that meeting. It is typical of the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues that they always take such remarks out of context when it suits the occasion. He may remember that the meetings that he and I addressed together were largely sympathetic to the general view that tenants should have some choice in the matter, however it is determined.

Mr. Soley: The Conservative councillors who were present were more in favour of what I said than what the hon. Gentleman said. That is why the Association of District Councils and the London Boroughs Association were so opposed to this rigged voting system. It would be hard to take what the hon. Gentleman said out of context, because he was asked a specific question. He may remember that the whole of the proceedings were tape-recorded, and the tapes are still in existence. If he wants to listen to the tapes and say how his remarks were taken out of context, I should be delighted to see his response in print.

The system is pretty grim. Part VII makes no mention of arrangements for outstanding loan debts. Perhaps the Minister will address that in his winding-up speech. That might well leave the local authority carrying debt for properties that have been transferred. When I hear the Government talking about how concerned they are about the ratepayer, I think of Thamesmead. I think of an estate valued at about £200 million that was knocked down for £25 million because the company taking it over said it could not afford it. That was £400 a house. What happened to the outstanding debt charges of £120 million? They were dumped on London ratepayers, who will go on paying them for many years.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Could the hon. Gentleman tell us what has happened to the rates in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham since his party took over?

Mr. Soley: The hon. Gentleman would not ask that question if he knew the latest news. The rate increase of 3 per cent. in Hammersmith and Fulham is one of the lowest in the country. It is far lower than rate increases in Conservative areas and far lower than that in the area of the Minister for Local Government. The rate increase in Suffolk, Coastal was one of the highest in the country. What a shambles. The Government try to fix local authorities so that rates have to go up, and they get it so wrong that Conservative councils have to put up the rates. Labour councils still manage to provide decent services while keeping rates within bounds, which is just about possible under this system.

I look forward to hearing interventions by the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) when he complains on behalf of his constituents about the poll tax. He will say to the Minister, "I am worried about the poll tax. It is hitting families in my constituency very badly. Each child over the age of 18 in a family has to pay the poll tax." We shall see a different look on the hon. Gentleman's face when he talks about local government finance then.

As I have said, part VII does not mention what is to happen to debt. Can the Minister tell us whether outstanding debts will be dumped on the ratepayers? We want to know, and so do ratepayers. Under part VII, applicants can proceed even if initially they are unable to come up with the full price. I am deeply worried about that, because some housing associations and other associations, many of which had good intentions, are getting into difficulties after taking over properties because they have not assessed as they should have assessed the financial consequences. That is why we have seen rents going up so much in areas that have been transferred.

There may be debates about the causes of rent increases in ex-GLC seaside homes. When rents go up to 40 per cent. of the net income of two pensioners who are above housing benefit level because they have two occupational pensions, they will not survive for long without suffering acute economic hardship. It is unnecessary and cruel for the Government to put them in that position.

These regulations should not have been laid. They are based on a premise that makes them unnecessary. For some tenants this is a one-way ticket out of the public sector; it is not "pick a landlord" legislation. I should love it if tenants of a bad landlord could change their landlord, but they cannot. This is all about trying to get local authorities to give up their housing without providing anything in its place. That is why the housing crisis in this country is no longer just an inner-city crisis or a crisis in the rented sector, but one that goes to urban and rural areas and hits people who are buying as well as people who are renting. This Government's housing policy is a failed policy, and these regulations are a small part of that failure.

10.36 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I do not wish to detain the House for long, but I must say that it is a great shame that debates of this kind take place at this time of night. This is really just an extension of the drip of legislation by the back door—through statutory instruments provided for in the primary legislation, the detail of which Ministers were unable to fill in when the legislation was going through its various stages.

As the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said, these regulations contain some improvements. The changes that will ensure that tenants get better information are welcome. Nevertheless, there is still not enough information about the reality of the Act, about the effect that privatisation will have on tenants over the years. I am

thinking in particular—this has been mentioned already—of circumstances in which people find that they have been tricked, conned or bought into making a bad decision. The landlord—supposedly squeaky clean—is taken off the Government's list of acceptable landlords, but the tenants have to put up with him indefinitely.

Individual tenants can do nothing about the malpractices that they are suffering. Many of them will not have voted for the system, but the abstention vote will ensure that, so far as the Government are concerned, those people's hands were raised to show that they were in favour of the system. Thank goodness we do not, as yet, have voting by show of hands in this House.

Part IV provides that, if a tenant in a block votes against a new landlord, that tenant has the right to stay with the council. The landlord is enabled to let that particular flat back to the council, which can sublet it to the tenant. That is an improvement.

The thing that will lead me to vote against these regulations—I understand that there will be a vote—is the procedure under part V which prevents the council, during the bidding process, from letting a council property on the estate in question.

Almost every other provision in this instrument is concerned with detail. In most cases the detailed provisions are unlikely to affect what is happening, but this provision relates directly to people's ability to have their housing needs met—to be certain of a roof over their heads, to be certain of a home for their husbands, or wives, and children. It is about the most basic of things. In my view, this procedure will deprive people of the security of a roof over their heads, simply because of the bureaucracy of a voting system. It is a system which should not be taking place in any case, but which, in this case, will ensure that at least some individuals suffer.

As has already been said, the Government repeatedly criticise councils for not housing people when there are properties in which they can be housed. Without any question, some councils are better at it than any others. The Government are worst of all. These regulations put into the rules a system that ensures that the accommodation cannot be properly used. That is not only an error but fundamentally and morally wrong. They should be opposed tonight if for no other reason than that they will keep out on the streets yet more people without the permanent security of housing for them and their children.

10.40 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Like many hon. Members, I have a surgery in my constituency, in my case every Friday. Every week, the greatest number of problems concern housing. People come to me asking me what can be done. Some live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Some are single-parent families. Some have lived in Newham for many years. Some are in unsuitable private rented accommodation, and others want transfers. Last Friday, about 70 per cent. of all the cases that I saw concerned housing. What can we offer such people? On many occasions, I have said that I only wish that Ministers, and in particular the Prime Minister, would come to my surgery to see how enormous is the housing problem in my area, and how that is mirrored throughout London and in no doubt in other cities.

If the Housing Act 1988 from which these regulations flow had done anything to address the housing crisis, I would have been most encouraged. I would also have been amazed, given the Government's record. The Act has nothing to do with building one single unit of the accommodation that is so desperately needed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said, it is all to do with ideology, and the drive to force local authorities out of providing housing. It is about petty, party political, ideological objectives rather than housing.

It does not take a great statistician to work out that there must be something wrong when homelessness in London has doubled since 1979 when the Government came to power. The number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has reached astronomic proportions. In 1983, Newham was spending £50,000 a year on bed and breakfast. This year, it will spend £5 million. That cannot be right.

While the queue of people wanting accommodation keeps growing, the Government cut the resources that local authorities need to build new houses. The Minister will correct me if I have got it wrong, but if I remember rightly, since the Government came into power, the housing investment programme has been cut by 80 per cent. in real terms. That is why homelessness has doubled. It is not because there are no good landlords waiting in the wings to come along and give people decent accommodation in which to live: it is all because the Government have cut, cut and cut again against the resources that local authorities need to spend on housing.

I hope that, if the Minister's bag carrier has just got the figure for the number of voids in Newham—I am sure that that is what I lipread—he will bear in mind the fact that we have about 1,100 voids because they are in unsafe tower blocks. They are those Taylor Woodrow Anglia tower blocks. No doubt the Minister remembers the name of Ronan Point. There are 110 of those unsuited tower blocks. In the drive to sell off units of accommodation, there are not many takers for tower blocks in Newham. Boroughs have been forced to sell off the best properties. Tenants have been left in the worst, and they have little chance now of ever moving out of them.

The problems of homelessness in London and elsewhere stem from the constant denial of resources to local authorities to build houses that people so desperately need. In the 1970s, we were building, about 25,000 units of accommodation a year in London. We are down now to fewer than 2,500. Building in the public sector is at a lower level now than it was in the 1920s. It is a scandal. The Minister and the Government generally are presiding over an obscene disgrace. In 1989, there are still tens of thousands living in conditions that no Member of this place would be prepared to tolerate for five minutes. At 10.45 pm we are discussing measures that have nothing to do with the problems of homelessness and nothing to do with building new homes. Instead, they are all about party political spite and ideology as the Government try to drive local authorities out of the provision of homes.

The regulations against which we are praying make the already fundamentally flawed policy even more problematic. They display disregard for the interests of tenants. They work against genuine efforts to find satisfactory tenant-based solutions to housing problems. They introduce the imposition of intolerable administrative and financial burdens on councils. The time scale for consultation is woefully inadequate. If the objective is to

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allow genuine discussion among tenants and their advisers to enable satisfactory solutions to housing problems, the time scale is nonsense.

I understand that 14 weeks is the maximum period for consultation, and it could be much less. The applicant landlord could effectively stifle debate by issuing the final offer only at the end of the first seven-week period. The belated concession of seven to 10 days for the council to respond is completely inadequate. There is then four weeks in which to vote, but that could be done on the first day, with only two weeks to follow up. Real debate could be restricted to only two weeks in the middle of the process. It is the opinion of the Association of London Authorities that 28 weeks is the minimum period for real debate and discussion.

Perhaps the Minister will argue that there will be debate during the preliminary phase, but few details are available about that. I hope that the Minister will tell us in greater detail what the consultation period will involve. As the procedure is non-statutory, an applicant landlord will not have to make a final offer. That means that details of rents, for example, will be missing. Genuine consideration of all the facts can take place only within the statutory consultation process, and under the regulations that could be limited to a mere couple of weeks.

Housing is far too important for these procedures to be acceptable even to the Minister. The provisions of only one vote for joint tenants will cause major problems. At the very least, we maintain that two signatures should be required to prove that the vote is acknowledged by both parties. The regulations are inadequate for meeting the needs of tenants whose first language is not English. That is a matter of major concern in a borough such as Newham. Regulation 16, schedule 3, states that,

"Where there is significant foreseeable demand"

material, should be translated. That provides too many loopholes for applicant landlords.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is all well and good for Ministers to sit and laugh and chatter through his excellent and carefully judged speech? If they had the week-in and week-out experience of London Members in dealing at their surgeries with people who have been in bed-and-breakfast hostels for years and who have had to bring up small children in that accommodation—in other words, if they had to deal with the victims of their housing policies—they would not be quite so glib and quite so happy. The regulations will do nothing to help the homeless and the poor and everything to aid and provide profits for property speculators.

Mr. Banks: There are times when I find it difficult to work out whether the Government are vicious or ignorant. I have come to the conclusion that they are both. There can be no doubt that they are certainly vicious, but I also believe that many Conservative Members are also ignorant of the problems. Although some Conservative Members know what the problems are, because of the party whipping system they are prepared to turn their minds away from the realities. Many of those who know the realities absent themselves from these debates and come in only to vote, because if they have not heard the arguments their consciences will perhaps not trouble them in quite the way that they should and they can stagger home to bed, if not with easy consciences, at least with consciences that have not been troubled with having to confront the reality of life for so many of our citizens in London and elsewhere.

I return to the issue of translated material. As I have said, there are too many loopholes for the applicant landlord when dealing with tenants, many of whom do not have English as their first language. Surely, if tenants are to exercise choice, which is the Government's stated aim, those tenants must have understandable information before them. There is nothing in the regulations to say how demand is to be assessed or what constitutes "significant". We maintain that if a single tenant does not understand, it is significant to him or her. I hope that the Minister will say a little more about translated material.

It appears that spoilt ballot papers will count as abstentions. Under this voting system, that means they will be votes in favour of transfer. That is nonsense, but under this Government, we are getting used to nonsense in voting procedures in these regulations. There is no question of democracy. The Government do not worry about concepts such as democracy, because it means whatever they want it to mean——

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Or whatever they can get away with.

Mr. Banks: Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) says, democracy means whatever the Government can get away with. However, that may not work. The tenants may vote against those landlords because they are not coming in to do a good job: they are trying to strip out the assets. It is no good the Minister saying, "Oh well, only approved landlords will come from the Housing Corporation," because it will be quite possible to pull the wool over the eyes of the Housing Corporation. If the corporation gets it wrong, there is no question of it saying, "We'll take those properties away from that stinking lousy landlord"; all that it will say is, "Sorry, you can't have any more people to exploit, but you can carry on exploiting the ones you've got."

Let us face it—this is a developers' charter, an asset-strippers' charter. It has nothing to do with finding housing for the people who desperately need it. Until we get rid of this stinking, rotten Government who could not care a monkey's toss, the housing crisis will just get worse and worse. No doubt the only thing that we shall get from the Minister are his laughs and sneers. That is all that the homeless can expect from him.

10.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Trippier): I assume that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was trying—as he so often does—to draw a laugh from Conservative Members. He is often genuinely funny. However, he was not all that funny today. Indeed, the comments made by Opposition Members generally did not show anything new or innovative over the arguments that they have tried to advance in the past on this part of the Housing Act 1988 which refers to tenants' choice. There were simply the regurgitated arguments that I have heard so many times because, for some reason or another, the Opposition seem to be worried about the legislation. I genuinely cannot guess why they are so worried, unless it is for purely party political purposes and they are concerned that we are moving into the heartland of the Labour party——

Mr. Battle: That is what this is all about—very interesting.

Mr. Trippier: We are not only offering, as we have done since 1979, an opportunity to tenants to exercise their right-to-buy; we are now offering them an extension to that—the opportunity to choose an alternative landlord——

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: I shall gladly give way in a moment.

How on earth can the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) suggest to the House that instead of choosing a new landlord, the legislation means choosing a tenant or, to use his precise phrase, it means "pick a tenant"? The hon. Gentleman knows—although his right hon. and hon. Friends may not—that the council house tenant has the right to veto his council house being sold over his head. The council house tenant can, by registering that veto, remain with the registering landlord, which will be the local authority. The hon. Gentleman knows that, and he probably suspects that the vast majority of his right hon. and hon. Friends—because they have not taken the time and trouble to read the regulations—do not. The hon. Gentleman said that the Government were putting fear into the minds of tenants. If anyone is doing that, it is the hon. Member for Hammersmith and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Winnick: It is not difficult to expose the Government's hypocrisy. Why is the right to decide that is given to council tenants not extended to private tenants? The Minister says that the regulations are all about giving choice. Does not the Minister know that many private tenants under pressure and suffering intimidation would gladly choose the local authority as their landlord?

Mr. Trippier: I have not heard such bunkum for a long time. As a result of the policies of previous Labour Governments, and of former Conservative Governments with which I personally would not have agreed, there has been such a substantial increase in the public sector housing stock that we have, I am ashamed to say, the highest percentage public housing stock in the whole of western Europe, and the lowest percentage—8 per cent. —of private rented accommodation in western Europe. The situation is so out of balance that there is no fair alternative.

The 1988 Act is designed to encourage the development and growth of the private rented sector—not by reincarnating Rachman, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith suggests, but by expanding the housing association movement. I remind the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, that a housing association is highly likely to be the alternative landlord putting forward proposals to the tenants, rather than the kind of private landlord that he suggests. The hon. Gentleman should make it clear to his hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) that housing associations are non-profit-making bodies.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): The Minister visited my constituency and knows that it has a very large private rented sector. What does he have to say to those of my constituents in the private rented sector who want the choice he intends giving public sector tenants?

Mr. Trippier: I have never been on an official visit to the hon. Gentleman's constituency during my time as a Minister with responsibility for housing. However, I shall be only too pleased to visit it and to see whatever the hon. Gentleman wishes to show me.

The matter in question has arisen on several previous occasions. Our responsibility is clearly to give public sector tenants an alternative. The private rented sector is tiny. Tenants who are dissatisfied with their private sector landlords can go to law. The changes we introduced in the 1988 Act ensure that the kind of rent previously charged in the public sector—which had a considerable effect on rents generally—can move up to being more of a market rent. The alternative available to the tenant should be fairer than in the past.

Mr. Winnick: Why does the Minister not answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) and by me? It is a very simple question: if, as he claims, there is a choice for public sector tenants, why is there no choice for private tenants? However misguided they may be, why not allow them to choose whether to become local authority tenants?

Mr. Trippier: If they wish to become local authority tenants, they can exercise that right by applying to the local authority. *[Interruption.]* Of course they can. As a result of changes in the 1988 Act, however, a number of tenants will choose to move into the private sector. Rather than choosing to exercise the right to buy—they may not be in a position, financially, to do that—they will move into accommodation owned by housing associations. There is clear evidence of that in recent surveys by the Department of the Environment. Some 40 per cent. of tenants consulted during the Professor MacLennan study said that they were prepared to pay a higher rent for a better service from the landlord. If we are to debate these matters seriously, let us examine the facts.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): May I take up the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher)? What about the former National Coal Board tenants in both our constituencies who have to put up with disgusting conditions now that their houses have been sold off to landlords whom they can never find, and who do not care about repairs? Can they go to the local authority and ask to be taken on?

Mr. Trippier: Earlier today, on a regional visit to the east midlands, I met representatives of the East Midlands housing association, which, I understand, has made bids for former Coal Board properties. *[Interruption]* I do not think that this is a new case, and I do not think that the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) knows a great deal about the east midlands.

Mr. Battle: That is a slur.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman usually casts slurs from a sedentary position. If he wishes to intervene, I shall be happy to give way.

Mr. Battle: Would the Minister kindly answer the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle under Lyme (Mrs. Golding) about the circumstances of people whose homes have already been sold over their heads, rather than talking about new circumstances in which negotiations are in progress with the housing association? Will he also not assume that Opposition Members know nothing about such matters?

Mr. Trippier: If the hon. Gentleman would open his ears instead of his mouth, a whole new world would be opened up to him. I was answering the question put to me by the hon. Lady. If housing associations are to bid for properties formerly owned by British Coal, it is up to them to produce an alternative better than what has been experienced by the tenants of those properties. That is what I learnt today.

Certainly tenancies that were the responsibility of British Coal may not have been handled properly; I have no way of knowing unless I am told. What concerns me is that such properties are improved by their alternative landlords. In this case and, I understand, in many other parts of the country, the landlord will be a housing association. But I do not want to be diverted on to a specific point about British Coal properties, or the hon. Member for Newham, North-West will be the first to accuse me of ducking the pertinent questions that he asked.

Mr. Soley: The reason the Minister is falling into a trap is that he is trying to answer a separate question. The question was: what will happen to the Coal Board tenants whose houses have already been sold to bad landlords? Does he not realise that many of those landlords cannot even be traced? Does he not know that the tenants drove down in a coach, only to find that the "registered office" was an empty house? Following the "World in Action" programme about a lady who was driven out of her home by Mr. Hoogstraten, I have written to the Lord Chancellor, the Home Secretary and the Minister for Housing, Environment and the Countryside. That lady is still out of her home, and all those Ministers say that nothing can be done. Where is the law to protect such people? Where is the choice of a different landlord?

Mr. Trippier: Even if what the hon. Gentleman says were true, it has absolutely nothing to do with tenants' choice, for which provision is made in section 4 of the 1988 Act. He knows that perfectly well. I am prepared to discuss that or any other matter with him or any other hon. Member, but it has nothing to do with the regulations. It is vital that I should respond to some of the questions that have been asked.

Mr. Abbott: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Trippier: I shall give way on one more occasion. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington has already intervened, so I shall give way to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay).

Mr. McKay: The Minister is not putting his mind to the question. By one means or another, the Government intend to do away with local authority housing. We have known that for a considerable period. Should not the tenants of British Coal have, as of right, the choice to become local authority tenants because local authorities are the best landlords?

Mr Trippier: I am talking about the new regulations. We have taken as many steps as we think are necessary to provide for tenants a better alternative than the one that they have now. I maintained that the right of tenants to exercise a veto over their homes being sold to other landlords is a sufficient safeguard to ensure that our proposals are fair. In the vast majority of cases where there is a choice for tenants, I believe that they will choose a housing association rather than a private landlord. Opposition Members have been scaremongering. The Opposition are frightened of the proposals, so they have chosen to attack the publicity that the Government—more particularly, the Department of the Environment—have provided on the proposals.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) concentrated on a leaflet that we have debated at great length. We tried to debate the matter in the media, but it was overtaken by events and it was never broadcast. As a result, however, of the publication of this—a copy of which he has had because I sent it to him, although he did not mention that fact—we have made the position clear. It is more suitable for him; it contains more pictures so he will probably be able to understand it a little better. We have coloured the pictures so that no mistake can possibly be made by the hon. Member for Hammersmith about what we are saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The Minister ought to identify, for the benefit of *Hansard*, what it is that he referred to as "this."

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful for the chance of a commercial, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is entitled "Tenants' Choice." It is a recent Department of the Environment and Welsh Office publication. We have gone to extreme lengths to make the alternatives abundantly clear. The hon. Member for Hammersmith claimed that the effect of not voting is not made clear in our leaflet. We say:

> "If the transfer happens . . . Special arrangements apply to commercial tenants and flat-owners . . . but otherwise if you voted yes—or did not vote at all—you will transfer to become a tenant of the alternative landlord; if you voted no, you will stay"

a tenant of the council.

I have no doubt that from time to time the hon. Member for Hammersmith will raise this matter in future debates on housing and that he will attack the leaflet line by line and word by word and say that it is not abundantly clear. This evening he asked, "Will the Government be honest about the one-way ticket?" We have been very honest about that, too. Page 17 of the booklet deals with the question

"Can I change my mind after the vote?"
The answer is:

"No. If the transfer goes ahead and you have either voted 'yes' or not cast your vote, you will not be able . . . to stay with the existing landlord or opt to go back to it later."

I fail to see how we could make that any clearer.

Mr. Soley *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: Is the hon. Gentleman going to change his tack? He either wants the position made clear or he does not, surely.

Mr. Soley: If the Minister listened to what I said about the previous leaflet and put it right in the present leaflet, I am pleased. Does the present leaflet make it clear that people who chose to stay with the council will, in certain circumstances, have to pay rents set by the new landlord, or that they will have to pay all the service charges and so on? Does it make that clear?

Mr. Trippier: If the hon. Member reads his intervention in *Hansard*, he will realise that he has made an absolute "Horlicks" of it. He asked whether I would make it clear what would happen to tenants who stayed with the local authority—that there might be substantial increases in rents and service charges. I think that he was referring to the fact that the alternative landlord—the private sector or housing association landlord—would then be in a position to increase rents and service charges. It would be the responsibility of the housing association, before the vote was taken, to make it clear to the tenants what the alternative actually meant to them. The alternative landlord would have to spell that out and make it abundantly clear—as anyone would have to—that it was prepared to offer a better service than the service being provided by the local authority. If the housing association could not persuade tenants that it could offer a better alternative, tenants plainly would not vote for it as an alternative landlord, so the situation simply does not arise.

Mr. Tony Banks: Suppose that a potential new landlord says, "We can offer you a better service," but does not mention rents, then gets hold of the properties and sticks the rents up 12 months later. Is the Minister saying that the new landlord will not be able to do that? Does he really believe that that situation will not arise, and will he assure us that, if it does, he will do something about it?

Mr. Trippier: On the latter point, of course we will, but the situation would not arise. Having suggested, rather stupidly, that the purpose of the legislation was to "strip out" local authorities' assets, which is palpable nonsense, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West went on to dismiss what he thought would be the Government's response to his speech, which is pretty clear: we have to approve the landlords through the Housing Corporation. *[Interruption.]* To be fair, the hon. Gentleman touched on that.

I would not in any way undermine the power that the Housing Corporation has in that regard and its responsibility for policing the 1988 Act. The landlords have to be approved and the housing associations will certainly be regularly monitored; they are at the moment, and that will continue. It is rather silly to suggest that tenants would vote for an alternative landlord if they did not know what the alternative rent regime would be. That would be stupid, and the hon. Gentleman's suggestion stretches credulity to breaking point.

Mr. Banks *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: I want to be fair to the hon. Gentleman's colleagues by trying to answer their questions.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) suggested that there was not sufficient information about the Government's proposals. I have dealt to some degree with the recent publication that we have made available. I accept entirely that much more needs to be done to increase tenants' awareness of precisely what the 1988 legislation means for them. We have made it clear time and again that we are not attacking local government in the round. But in many cases the housing stock that local authorities have to manage is so enormous that they could not possibly manage it effectively or efficiently. We believe that their tenants should have the opportunity to exercise the right to choose an alternative landlord.

As a result of the legislation, there has been a considerable degree of deathbed repentance on the part of a number of local authorities that I would consider inefficient. If I were to select examples, I might be able to carry the hon. Member for Truro with me and we would agree that a particular local authority was inefficient. Many local authorities are trying to win back the favours and affections of their tenants. As I have suggested, it is a little late. If they improve their service as a result of our introducing the legislation, it should be welcomed on all sides of the House.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the Minister explain why so many local authorities in rural areas have rather little housing stock and are probably not on the Minister's list of local authorities that cannot run their affairs properly? Torbay is such an example where the Minister has turned down a request for transfer. By deathbed repentances, is he referring to the fact that in Torbay dead people were counted as having voted in favour of a transfer?

Mr. Trippier: I have yet to see any evidence that such people were counted. Although I have heard it from the hon. Member for Truro and the hon. Member for Hammersmith, I have seen absolutely no evidence that that ever occurred. In regard to the legislation, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that those who have the opportunity to vote will be not only very much alive, but even if they are at sea, or even under the sea in submarines, to quote the hon. Gentleman's favourite example, it will be the responsibility of the electoral officer to ensure that they are reached. It is perfectly possible for someone serving with Her Majesty's forces abroad to be contacted in the preliminary period, through the normal British forces post office system, and that will be the responsibility of the electoral officer.

With regard to the point raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West about homelessness, there is an unmistakeable connection between the number of empty properties under local authority management in London and the number of homeless families. It shows the degree of inefficiency of housing management in local authorities such as his own, and particularly in Brent, that they have not turned round those empty properties and brought them back on to the market.

Mr. Banks: This one always comes up. I received an answer from the Under-Secretary of State for the

[Mr. Banks]

Environment, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), who is not altogether dead; indeed, I understand that he is still alive. I asked him:

"what average percentage of the total housing stock of (a) councils, (b) housing associations and (c) private landlords was vacant at the last recorded date."—[*Official Report*, 13 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 664.]

The Minister's reply was that the average vacant dwellings as a percentage of stock of local authorities was 2·4 per cent., the figure for housing associations was 2·5 per cent., and the figure for private rented dwellings was 4·1 per cent. The fact is that in the local authority areas the percentage of vacancies is lower than in any other housing sector and considerably lower than in the Government's own housing sector.

Mr. Trippier: What else does the hon. Gentleman expect? There are literally thousands of private sector landlords who have varying sizes of stock. How would the hon. Gentleman, as a constituency Member of Parliament—forgetting his party affiliation—expect to chase within his constituency individual private landlords to ensure that the private rented sector is turned round and brought on to the market? I am sure that he and I agree that it would be pretty difficult. I know that the hon. Gentleman is fair in this respect.

The further difficulty the hon. Gentleman would have is persuading Newham—this is a darn sight easier problem—to improve the efficiency of the local authority and ensure that the empties are brought back on to the market and used to provide accommodation for those who are genuinely homeless.

Conservative Members are sick to death of the Opposition trying to claim that they have a monopoly of concern for the homeless—[HON. MEMBERS: "We do."]. They do not. It is clear that bringing the empty properties back on to the market would relieve the pressure that the homeless are putting on the local authorities. If only one Opposition Member would admit that it is a sign of inefficiency that local authorities are not bringing those empty properties back on to the market, their claim would at least be credible. They do not turn round to their local authorities and say that they are inefficient.

There is one exception. He is a well-known Socialist but he is not a Member of the House. The leader of Liverpool city council, Councillor Keva Coombes, has been extremely fair recently in admitting publicly and with me in a debate on a radio programme, that Liverpool city council is inefficient in two regards. The first is in bringing empty properties back into use and the other is in not chasing effectively its rent arrears. Because someone such as that is prepared to admit that improvements can and should be made, it is beholden on Opposition Members also to admit that the performance of many Socialist-controlled local authorities is not up to scratch. Professor Maclennan did not do what the hon. Member for Hammersmith said. He confirmed that the efficiency within housing associations was eminently superior to local authorities.

Tenants' choice is a new opportunity for tenants of which the Government are proud. The Opposition did not like the Government giving tenants the right to choose to buy their own homes. They do not like us giving them the right to choose an alternative landlord. We have also built in the provision enabling tenants to stay with the local authority. Therefore, the Opposition find it extremely difficult to attack our proposals. I urge the House to support our measures and I commend them to the House.

11.23 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Minister said that he was ashamed of the total number of local authority dwellings in Britain and that he considered that there were too many. The Minister should instead be concerned about and ashamed of the acute housing crisis in Britain, about the number of families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and about the fact that only five minutes away from here many poeople, not all of whom are beggars—many are young people who have come from the north—will have to sleep in the open air by the embankment tonight. The Minister has expressed no shame or concern about that, so what kind of Housing Minister do we have?

My hon. Friends have, in the main, referred to the housing crisis in London——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have taken a relaxed view of the scope of the debate, but it is now turning into a general debate on homelessness, which cannot be permitted.

Mr. Winnick: I was referring to the Minister's replies to questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If local authority tenants are to be given a choice of landlord, it is only proper that private tenants should be given the same choice. My hon. Friends referred to former tenants of British Coal, who are unaware who their present landlord is—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) will try to control herself——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I wish that Labour-controlled authorities would fill the empty dwellings under their control.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Lady should perhaps have asked my permission before intervening.

My hon. Friend referred to tenants being unaware who their landlords are. Why should they not be able to choose to remain with private landlords or become tenants of a local authority or housing association? The regulations will certainly give no rights to those tenants.

We are discussing only the public sector, and the Minister gave the game away when he described it as the Labour heartland. He is concerned not with housing or tenants but with party politics. He wants to undermine the public rented sector because of the long Tory vendetta against council housing.

The voting system is crooked. Anyone who abstains is regarded as voting in favour. The Minister proved tonight what we have said all along—that he is concerned not about housing, or the acute distress being caused to so many families, or the fact that people who cannot afford a mortgage and cannot obtain local authority dwellings are living in abysmal conditions, but about undermining councils and harming and penalising public sector tenants.

Mr. Soley: Given the way in which the Minister dealt with the subject, he ought to be known as the hon. Member for used car sales. He refused to answer the question about the regulations keeping properties empty during the takeover because councils will not be able to let

them. He keeps answering questions that were not asked because he cannot answer the difficult questions. That is why he should be selling cars.

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The Minister constantly tells local authorities that they are in the wrong, and he constantly informs the House of the number of local authority dwellings that are vacant. Yet, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, there are twice as many empty private dwellings. If the regulations make it more difficult for local authorities to let dwellings, how can he criticise them when he is the Minister responsible for making the position worse?

Everything that the Minister said showed that he should not be in charge of housing. Far from looking on him as a Minister responsible for housing, I see him as the anti-housing Minister. He is the worst junior Minister—*[Interruption.]* I know that there is a great deal of competition for that title, but the Minister has shown that he is the worst junior Minister in this present wretched Administration. Far from being concerned about housing, the Government want to cause the maximum damage to the public rented sector. When we vote against the regulations tonight, we shall do so with every possible justification.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 136, Noes 206.

Division No. 159] **[11.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spaid'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael

Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Dorrell and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

National Curriculum

11.42 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Education (National Curriculum) (Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study in Science) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 309), dated 3rd March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th March, be annulled.

It may also be convenient for the House to consider the following prayer,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Education (National Curriculum) (Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study in Mathematics) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 308), dated 3rd March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th March, be annulled.

Understandably and rightly, the House has today been preoccupied with the appalling events at the weekend at Hillsborough. The debate on these motions is something of a landmark in post-war education history. As far as I am aware, it is the first occasion on which the curriculum for science and mathematics has been debated in detail in the House since the Education Act 1944. I am glad that the Opposition have helped to secure the debate.

In its manifesto for the last general election, the Labour party called for a clear but flexible core curriculum agreed at national level. If we had won the election, the implementation of that pledge would have involved a process not dissimilar to that of which the orders are a part. There will always be much room for debate over the content and flexibility of any national curriculum, the means of assessment and the resources needed to deliver it. I think that there is now a common appreciation that, through the method of a national curriculum the final broad decisions on the core of what should be taught in schools should be the subject of the political process and the deliberations of the House. I do not resile from that conclusion.

But with the power over the curriculum that has been taken by this House go very important responsibilities—to ensure that we do not act in a destructive or partisan way; to ensure that we do not treat the curriculum as some party political football; to ensure that we allow the professionals whose advice is sought a climate of freedom in which to come to their own recommendations; and to ensure that any differences between that advice and the final decisions by Ministers and this House should be transparent and clear. It is crucial that we do that, for the success of any national curriculum depends upon the confidence of teachers.

Thanks not least to the painstaking work of members of the subject working parties of the National Curriculum Council and of inspectors and trainers, I have been struck, in the very many visits that I have made to schools, by the good will that exists among teachers towards the national curriculum—much the same as the great good will there was, and remains, for GCSE. I visited five schools in the past week and spoke in detail to the teachers. They all said that they were willing to make a go of the national curriculum, whatever their doubts. There are considerable doubts, some of which I shall raise. There are doubts about the timetable, about the resources, about the methods of assessment and, in the case of the order concerning science, about part of the order itself.

This debate takes place on two orders—the one relating to maths, and the one relating to science. To secure debates on both, we had to pray against both, but it is our intention to vote only against the one dealing with science —for specific reasons that I will spell out. There have been no substantial representations against the mathematics order in its final form. There was, of course, a vigorous debate from the time of the first working party report in December 1987.

The popular press has alighted on this interesting issue of whether long division and long multiplication without the use of calculators should be taught in schools. In my view—I think that, on this issue, I speak for my colleagues —it is a good idea that children should be able to divide three-digit numbers by two-digit numbers without the use of a calculator, and that they should be able to carry out similar multiplication operations.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Give us an example.

Mr. Straw: As the hon. Member will know from his own study of the attainment levels under the mathematics national curriculum, that operation does not have to be done in the head. Mentally, one has to be able only to divide two-digit numbers by single digits, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate.

The reason I think that this is a good idea is that long division and long multiplication do give an instinctive idea of mathematical relationships and orders of magnitude. It is important that children should have that facility. But we should not be Luddites about the use of calculators and computers. I have observed the way in which calculators help mathematics and mathematical relationships to come alive for children. They certainly ensure that children can make faster, better and more interesting progress than I observed 30 years or more ago when I was a child.

In mathematics there are considerable challenges ahead. I was struck by the remarks of Professor Howson, reported in *The Times Educational Supplement* recently:

"no other major developed country appeared to have so few of its 17-year-olds studying mathematics".

The challenge to raise interest and attainment in mathematics is very substantial. When visiting a school last week, in two adjoining classrooms I found that, among children of the same age level—these were 15 and 16—there was a difference of probably 10 years in the level of attainment.

Let me turn now to the proposals for the science national curriculum, which, appropriately, are in the red document, rather than the blue one. We propose to vote against this order, for two reasons: first, because we believe that it places too little emphasis on curiosity and inquiry; secondly—and more important—because it proposes that there should be established for 14 to 16-year-olds a two-tier science curriculum in which some children will devote between 16·6 per cent. and 20 per cent. of their time to a dual subject in science, whilst others will devote only 12·5 per cent. of their time to a single subject. In making this case, we are seeking not to substitute our views for those of the National Curriculum Council, but to substitute the original views of the science working party for those of the National Curriculum Council and the Secretary of State.

The science working party proposed that there should be four profile components—knowledge and understanding, exploration and investigation, communication, and science in action. It was concerned to ensure that the science curriculum should develop not only a knowledge of scientific processes and an understanding of those—as it must—but the context in which they have been developed and take place, the historic and social position of science, and of the need properly to communicate the scientific results. Communication in science is not incidental to the process but lies at the very heart of the scientific method.

I am sorry to say that that recommendation was rejected by the Secretary of State, in the advice that he gave to the National Curriculum Council in August, and the four profile components were compressed into two. With that compression, much greater weight was given to the acquisition of knowledge, and correspondingly much less weight was given to these other important components. I can give an illustration of that. When knowledge and understanding was part of four-part components, at key stage 4, it would receive 40 per cent. of the weighting, but it is now to receive 70 per cent.

That criticism would not have been enough by itself —although we regret the change—to have caused our opposition to this order. The establishment of a two-tier science curriculum is serious and is the principal reason why we intend to vote against the order. The science working party said that there should be a one-tier, two-subject, dual award at GCSE level for all pupils. It said that for secondary school children, these subjects should receive not less than 16·6 per cent. of curriculum time, and in the fourth and fifth years, the time should not exceed 20 per cent. The National Curriculum Council proposed what is described in the document as model A to implement that.

At the behest of the Secretary of State, the National Curriculum Council proposed a model B for some pupils, which is one subject involving just 12·5 per cent. of the time, and some key attainment targets are omitted from that. They include attainment target No. 2 on the variety of life, attainment target No. 5 on human influences on the earth, attainment target No. 7 on making new materials, and attainment target No. 12—this gave me considerable surprise, given the Secretary of State's interest—on the scientific aspect of information technology, including microelectronics.

The decision to establish this two-tier science was taken against the wishes of the science working party, and those of the overwhelming number of respondents to the National Curriculum Council consulted. This decision led to suspicions that the problem of resources, of shortages of cash and of teachers, may have motivated the Department of Education and Science to go down this road.

In December, I wrote to the Secretary of State arguing against the NCC and in favour of the science working party. I conceded:

"It may be that there are some children for whom a double science at GCSE would not be appropriate".

The Secretary of State picked that up in his reply. The whole of my letter was devoted to establishing the case for a single-tier, dual-subject science, and I meant only that there may be a tiny handful of children—for example, children who had been statemented, or who were near-statemented, and for whom such a science course was not appropriate. I do not accept that it is appropriate for schools that the House should establish this two-tier

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system of science teaching at secondary level, which can become an escape route out of the difficulties of teacher shortages that many schools now face.

It is either a way round teacher shortages, to which we object, or we object to it for the reasons which the Secretary of State outlined in his reply to me on 6 December 1988. In justifying the two tiers, he said that the provision was there to allow some flexibility for a minority of pupils whose time would be better spent in developing a special talent in, say, modern languages or music. It may be appropriate to provide time for modern languages and music for some pupils, but the way to do that is by introducing far greater flexibility into the foundation subjects rather than in diluting the core.

If we opt for two-tier science, there will be two serious effects. Opportunity and achievement will be restricted beyond 16 years for many pupils, and there will be pressure, especially on girls, not to follow two science subjects at GCSE level, with all the implications for reducing their opportunities later. That is an issue that is developed by Lynda Carr, the principal education officer of the Equal Opportunities Commission, who said:

"We shall find the kind of sex differentiation which the EOC has encountered in complaints from parents: environment studies courses where boys do science and girls do nature or craft courses."

All of us know only too well the pressures within schools that act against girls following science courses, especially those which are based on mathematics and physics. Given the propensity of schools and our culture to downgrade science for girls, we should be extremely careful in providing an escape route by which schools can allow that to happen.

I find the view of the Secretary of State and of the Department odd, given that both the predecessor of the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), who is now the Minister for Overseas Development, and the Secretary of State have separately in the past week said that there should be two-subject science for 14 to 16-year-olds and that it should be available to all pupils. The Royal Society of Chemistry recommended 20 per cent. of curriculum time for science. It

"supported the Engineering Council on Double Award Balanced Science, which contained the following: 'Balanced science courses . . . occupy about 20 per cent. of curriculum time . . . and are appropriate for all students'".

The Secretary of State, in the Department of Education and Science document 174/87, welcomed the report and the proposition of 20 per cent. of curriculum time for science for all students. In that circumstance, I find it odd that the Secretary of State should have changed his view.

The way in which two-tier science may block opportunities beyond 16 years is spelt out by the NCC. It has said that it is unlikely that the breadth of concepts covered in a single-award science would ever include the foundation knowledge and understanding that is required for all three science disciplines at O-level. In other words, if children are permitted to follow the single subject at 16 years, they will not have an opportunity later to go on to do A-levels. That is because the sort of course that they will have followed up to 16 will not have been of sufficient breadth or depth to enable them to do that.

I have referred to a helpful brief from the Royal Society of Chemistry, which has raised two other issues on which I should be grateful for a response from the Secretary of State. One is that the orders do not of themselves ensure balance within the science curriculum. It observes that no guidance is given on the relative weightings to be applied to the 16 attainment targets that contribute to the knowledge and understanding of a profile component. I hope that the Secretary of State will deal with that. It recommended—I should be glad of an observation on this—that the three main sciences of biology, chemistry and physics should be given weightings of at least 30 per cent. each.

This is not the occasion for a major debate on teacher shortages in general, but it must be well known to the House that there are serious shortages that are affecting schools in science and mathematics. Figures published last week by the Clearing House and Graduate Teacher Training Registry show that applications for physics and maths are down by 25 per cent. and 16 per cent. respectively this year, and that last year applications were down 14 per cent. in maths and 17 per cent. in physics. As the appendix to the report of the interim advisory committee makes clear, there has been a massive drop in the number of students taking chemistry courses, when compared with the target set by the Department.

Professor Alan Smithers and Dr. Pamela Robinson of Manchester university have suggested that on an optimistic forecast we could be 4,141 mathematics teachers short by 1995 and on a pessimistic forecast about 12,000 teachers short. The situation is therefore serious, but I have yet to hear any serious strategy for dealing with these shortages from the Secretary of State. If they continue, it will not be possible properly to deliver the national curriculum, as spelt out in the regulations, in any of our schools. It is as serious as that.

I turn now to assessment. Going round schools and talking to teachers, I have found that their greatest anxiety relates to the methods and the scope of the assessment systems that will be put in place to assess and test aspects of the national curriculum. One headmaster told me last week that there is anxiety about the level of bureaucracy that will be required. How much paperwork will be imposed on teachers? There is also anxiety about the technical problems of making assessments that are in any sense meaningful, especially in primary schools, and there is anxiety about the publication of results. I am aware that the contracts for tests have been let and that they are now being validated, but I should be grateful if the Secretary of State could provide us with as much information as he has available about the nature and forms of assessment, especially at seven and 11, and about its relationship with GCSE testing at 16

It is also important that the Secretary of State spells out a little more clearly his view about the publication of test results, especially at seven. The Education Reform Act 1988 laid down that schools should not be forced to publish test results at seven. Our view was that they would provide such a distorted view of schools and individual pupils that they should not be published at all. Opposition Members have never said that crude data on test results at 11, 14 and 16 should not be published. Since we believe in openness in government, both locally and nationally, it follows that we believe that crude data should be available.

However, by itself, the publication of such crude data could lead to false impressions about the progress that schools are making with individual children. While all of us are concerned for our own children—every parent is

concerned about the absolute level of attainment of the individual child—one does not judge the effectiveness of schools on the aggregate absolute level of attainment reached by those schools, but on the degree of progress that the school is able to make with individual pupils, taking into account the level of attainment of the intake of the school and comparing it with the level of attainment when the children leave the school.

To use a piece of market jargon, we should judge schools by their creation of education value added. A school in a less prosperous area, dealing with children whose absolute attainment may be far less than that of children in a more prosperous area, may be doing far better than the school in a prosperous area, which, even if the teachers were not very competent, could still turn out well.

There is also the problem that has been brought to my attention today, whereby, because of changes in the population, perhaps due to an increase in the birth rate, the intake of a school may change over the years. If all that one is considering is crude test results, the judgment will be that the school has gone down, whereas, because the children have a lower level of attainment at entry, the crude results suggest lower levels of attainment, although the teachers may be working harder.

These are critical issues if the test results are to be used fairly to help schools to raise their attainment, rather than to damn schools in areas of less prosperity and to act as an alibi and a mask for the performance of schools in more prosperous areas.

My final point concerns a suggestion in the *Financial Times* for 13 April that primary school streaming may be reintroduced as a consequence of the national curriculum. The provenance of that report is fairly obscure, and I shall be grateful if the Secretary of State will say whether that report was fairly based on a reading of the circular. My concern about streaming and mixed ability classes is only that we should go for the system that offers the best teaching, and that we should not hold hard and fast opinions on the matter. The evidence I have received from primary school teachers is that children of all abilities learn best in mixed ability classes. Also, because most primary schools have one or two-form entry, the problems of organising streaming are virtually impossible for them to overcome—unless they are to be provided with many more staff than they currently have.

Even in the days of the 11-plus, there was remarkably little streaming in many primary schools, simply because of the physical problems of organising streaming, let alone the educational disadvantages.

When the Education Reform Bill 1988 passed through this House, the Opposition argued strongly that the national curriculum should apply to all schools, whether private or state, and that it should be a framework and not a straitjacket. We argued that it should be flexible, and that its tests should aim at diagnosing children's strengths and weaknesses and at informing parents of their children's progress. We emphasised that sufficient resources should be available to make all that a reality. We said that, above all, the national curriculum should be a means of providing a better education for all children. It is on that basis that we must judge the two orders. In those terms, one of the orders passes that test and the other fails it.

12.6 am

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I thank the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) for the tone of his speech. As he said, the debate is something of a landmark, in that the House has not debated the curriculum in our schools—other than in last year's Education Reform Bill—since 1945. Tonight, the House is asked to approve the mathematics and science curriculum for all state-maintained schools with children aged between five and 15.

It is very important that the national curriculum—I did everything that I could in arranging it to ensure this—does not become a party political matter. That is why I welcome the tone of the hon. Gentleman's speech.

The two strands of the Government's education reform programme are to improve standards and to increase choice. Tonight we are dealing with the main thrust of the policy to improve standards. I am glad that it is widely welcomed throughout the education system. The keystone of our programme is improved standards for all children in all our schools. That keystone has been widely debated. I announced a commitment to introduce the national curriculum about two and a half years ago, and before the last general election I established the two working groups to which the hon. Gentleman referred—one on maths and one on science. We are debating the result of their work tonight.

I thank all those people who served on the working groups. I shall reflect for a moment on the time that it takes to produce such documents. Some people thought it an easy matter to write the national curriculum. It has taken much longer than people imagine—two years in respect of two subjects that were thought to be easier to deal with. Difficult matters lie ahead of us in respect of English—even more difficult in respect of the content of the history curriculum. We thought that we were on secure, firm ground in defining maths and science, but it has still taken all that time.

I shall spell out the process. The working groups published interim reports after six months' work as a guide for general discussion. They were used as the basis on which to consult a large number of organisations and individuals. The working groups produced final reports on 30 June last year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I then commented on the reports and sent them, with our proposals, to the National Curriculum Council. The NCC sent out those proposals for even wider consultation, and after due consideration submitted its proposals to me. That was in November last year. I then published draft orders, which were also sent out for consultation. These are the final orders.

Let me briefly spell out what the documents involve. What we are seeing tonight is the result of a long consultative process. If they flick through the documents, hon. Members will note their precision in setting out 10 levels of attainment for children from the age of five to the age of 16. For the first time, the blueprint contains considerable detail about the attainments that should be expected of children at the ages of seven, 11, 14 and 16.

The documents come to life in the examples that they give. Rather than merely saying that children should be able to read, write, count and order numbers, the blueprint says, for example, that they should know that if a set of eight pencils is counted the answer is always the same, regardless of how they are arranged. That may seem a

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simple example, but children have to start at that level. Other examples, relating to ages up to 16, deal with very complicated matters. The same applies to science. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give us some examples."] I am tempted to: there are plenty. I am suitably modest when it comes to maths and science.

The specifications for what a child should be able to do at those different ages is revolutionary, and I was glad to note that the hon. Member for Blackburn had no real quarrel with the maths proposals. However, he made a series of important points about the science proposals, and I should like to deal with those.

The important thing about the national curriculum is that children will not be able to drop subjects at the age of 14, as they can now. The three core subjects are English, maths and science; the seven foundation subjects are history, geography, technology and foreign languages—the four "academic" subjects—and music, art and physical education. I am not saying that music and art are not academic: they are all equally good and equally demanding, as they should be.

The general pattern today is that at 14 boys tend to drop foreign languages and girls tend to drop science and technology. All children will now be expected to take science up to the age of 16. That, too, constitutes a revolution in our education system. The latest figures suggest that in year five in a secondary school only about 40 per cent. of pupils are studying biology, fewer than 35 per cent. studying physics, fewer than 30 per cent. studying chemistry and about 30 per cent. studying general science, while 5 per cent. do not take science at all. The national curriculum will not only ensure that those figures rise, but will ensure the study of a balanced science curriculum for all pupils. That is important, because a good many children take biology at 14, 15 and 16 as their one science. Important though that study is, it does not cover the full range of science, taking in chemistry and physics.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Secretary of State accept the criticism voiced by the Royal Society of Chemistry that offering model B encourages premature specialisation?

Mr. Baker: That point was raised in some detail by the hon. Member for Blackburn. It concerns what is known as the 12·5 per cent. option. Schools can now decide whether children should study science for a double award—that is, model A—or for a single award. Model A involves roughly 20 per cent. of curriculum time; taking one science involves roughly 12·5 per cent., or one period a day.

The hon. Members for Blackburn and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) argue that all children should take a double science to GCSE level at 16. The argument, and that of the Royal Society of Chemistry, is that that would still allow a range of options. That would take up 20 per cent. of school time for all pupils and would cover 17 attainment targets. I acknowledge that that is also proposed by the science working group. However, I took further advice on it, as did the National Curriculum Council. After considering the matter, the NCC recommended that there should be an option at the age of 14 to take a single GCSE in science. That covers 10 attainment targets—more than half the 17 attainment targets for the double option. I emphasise that the NCC's decision to make that recommendation was its own independent decision. I agreed with its recommendation.

It would be difficult to identify any school in the country where all the pupils study science for 20 per cent. of their time. That is not surprising. Even those head teachers who are most enthusiastic about the 20 per cent. option—the double science—want some flexibility. There is no question of the 12·5 per cent. option being related to problems of teacher supply, which are being effectively tackled. It is a response to the widespread and genuine concern for some flexibility. The 12·5 per cent. option is a balanced course, including the physical sciences. It will involve teaching physics, biology and chemistry.

I should make it clear that I expect that most pupils will study science for 20 per cent. of their time. There will be a strong recommendation to all schools that they should offer a double science to all pupils. I want to make it clear, however, that the 12·5 per cent. single science option is a tremendous improvement on what is available at the moment. It is a massive step forward. A very large number of our children do not study a balanced science curriculum at the ages of 15 and 16. They will now have to take balanced science studies for at least 12·5 per cent. of their time—for a period a day. It is not just one of the sciences, such as biology or chemistry. It is rounded science. It is not a soft option. We must remember also that all pupils will also be dealing with science-related topics in maths and technology.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Many people would agree with the Secretary of State if his proposals were really directed towards pupils' needs. In timetabling, there are the needs of the pupils and school resources. It would be nice if the timetable reflected pupils' needs, but the danger is that it reflects what is available in schools. Will the Secretary of State give an absolute guarantee that the resources, particularly teachers, will be provided to ensure that the timetable meets the needs of pupils?

Mr. Baker: I shall come to resources and teachers in a moment. Could I complete my remarks on the 12·5 per cent. option?

I emphasise that this is not an option that I have thought up and tried to push through. Her Majesty's inspectorate gives strong support to the view that the 12·5 per cent. option represents a worthwhile study of science. The hon. Member for Blackburn often quotes the words of the senior chief inspector, but on this matter the senior chief inspector was quite clearly of the view that the 12·5 per cent. option should be available. The option allows for an average pupil to be able to explain changes of state and the energy changes associated with them; to be able to explain evaporation, diffusion and dissolving, in terms of simple kinetic theory and to be able to understand the magnetic effect of an electric current and electromagnetic induction. I do not believe that that is a soft option.

As for teacher resources, recruitment to initial teacher training in 1988 was a record 20,180—up by 5 per cent. over 1987. Primary recruitment, at 11,370, was up by 12·5 per cent. Applications for primary training for students who will start their training in September of this year is even better. It is up by 14 per cent. It was because of the

worrying position on applications for training in the secondary shortage subjects in 1984 and 1985 that I launched my programme.

I recognise that there is a problem with the supply of teachers in the shortage subjects. I identified that when I launched my action programme three years ago and set out six main points of attack. The House will know that there are tax-free, non-means-tested bursaries of £1,300 a year for teacher trainees in maths, physics and CDT. This year I have extended the scheme to chemistry trainees and there has been a most welcome increase in the number of applications. The scheme has helped to reverse the decline in the number of applications for those subjects and there is now about 2,400 bursaries.

In-service training is another important element. Part of the problem is the mismatch of skills in the profession itself. It is very important to have an extensive in-service training programme to retrain teachers in other skills. I have devoted £35·5 million over two years to support in-service training in shortage subjects by schools and LEAs. The aim is to tackle the hidden shortage, as it is sometimes called, and to provide support to upgrade the skills of teachers who were inadequately qualified in the shortage subjects.

My third point of attack was advertising and publicity. The hon. Member for Blackburn chided me from time to time, and says that my advertising and publicity budget has increased by a modest factor of several hundred per cent. [HON. MEMBERS: "3,000."] That shows the importance of the maths curriculum; hon. Members can distinguish between hundreds and thousands.

I launched the teaching as a career unit in April 1987 and, for the first time, teaching has a voice in the career market place, aimed at promoting the profession. In the past three years we have had a series of positive and imaginative advertising and publicity campaigns, backed by new booklets—also part of my publicity budget—aimed at the intending teacher. The campaign has been a success. Our recent advertising campaign, which ended just a few weeks ago, has attracted 10,000 responses so far. Responses continue to be received every day and are being processed.

The fourth item of the programme to encourage more people to enter the teaching programme is support for local initiatives. For example, we are helping to fund a course aimed at recruiting people from the ethnic minorities into primary teaching in Newham. By recruiting people who live locally—many of whom will have had teaching experience overseas—we can make a solid contribution to solving the problem of primary teacher supply in that authority.

Mature entrants are another important element. About 4,000 mature entrants a year enter the teaching profession. They are people in their late 20s, 30s and 40s. The fact that many of them have had experience in other walks of life or in bringing up families means that they can greatly enrich the teaching profession. I have supported the development of new courses in the shortage subjects to help attract mature entrants. We have shortened the two-year BEd and part-time PGCE courses. I have also funded a pilot programme of 11 short courses, aimed at mature entrants and with the object of giving them an opportunity to find out in the classroom what teaching is like.

I now come to my proposal for licensed teachers——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Bearing in mind the emergency scheme at the end of the last war and what the Secretary of State has just said about mature entrants, will he now explain why he did not extend and intensify that, rather than proposing that there should be so-called licensed teachers?

Mr. Baker: I have only a small memory of the scheme during the war.

Mr. Spearing: After the war.

Mr. Baker: After the war. I believe that there was a scheme rather similar to the Bevin boys in the war—*[Interruption.]* Several of my predecessors have taken initiatives to encourage people to enter teaching. I am not talking just about the proposals under the Attlee Government of the 1940s but about initiatives under successive Conservative and Labour Governments. We are continuing a series of initiatives, all of which must be taken in hand and tried.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Baker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. This is a short debate and others will wish to speak.

I shall be publishing the details shortly. Some of the criticisms made of the proposals, particularly at the teacher union conferences, were off beam. It is not a way of getting teachers into the classroom on the cheap. It is a way of encouraging people in their 20s, 30s and 40s who have had other careers in electronics or other sectors of the business world or the public sector, who want a career change. They will be qualified people who have spent at least two years in higher education. Many such people already enter the teaching profession, but they have to end their professional work and do a year's study in a college. The licensed teacher scheme will mean that, instead of doing a year's study in a college, on a grant, those people will be taken on by an LEA as a salaried teacher and trained on the job. It is important that there should be agreed training programmes extending over two years and then the LEA will decide whether they reach qualified teacher status.

I am surprised that there has been some opposition to that idea, as I have been pressed by many local education authorities, including Labour-controlled authorities, to bring forward the proposal as quickly as possible. Those Labour-controlled authorities planning to take over responsibility for education in London specifically stressed at a collective meeting with me, that they would like the scheme to be introduced as quickly as possible.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not giving way, as I know that he will be speaking in a few moments.

I have also proposed another flexible route leading to qualified teacher status—the proposal for articled teachers. Starting in September 1990, that route into teaching will be open to young graduates and to mature entrants. Those are people who have taken a degree at a university or a polytechnic. At the moment they have to take a PGCE at a college. The proposal is that they will be taken on by a local education authority, paid as a teacher and trained for two years to qualify for a PGCE. I am

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inviting LEAs and higher education institutions to work up schemes to meet conditions that I shall lay down to ensure that trainees receive adequate support and an appropriate lighter teaching load during the period of training.

In the next week or so the inspectors will be publishing a report about teacher training in France. The House will find it interesting, because a great deal of teacher training in France takes place on the job. There is no watering down, as the proposals apply to people with qualifications.

Mr. Straw: The debate is specifically about science and maths and I shall try to stick to that topic and not extend it into a general debate about teacher shortages. Despite what the Secretary of State spelt out, applications for physics and maths fell this year and last year. When does he expect that the shortages in those key subjects will be over?

Mr. Baker: I hope and believe that the combined effects of all the proposals will lead to an adequate staffing in those subjects in the 1990s. A great deal of the problem arises from a mismatch.

The proposals for licensed teachers apply to people who could have qualifications and degrees in science subjects, physics, chemistry, technology and computer sciences, and who want to enter the teaching profession. We should welcome those people, as they have a great deal to offer.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: How many?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman asks, "How many?", but one of the chief unions, which I hope the Opposition Front Bench will not support, did not want anyone at all from those sources. That is reactionary and wrong.

I rebut the charge that the Government are being complacent about teacher shortages, as that is simply not the case.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State mentioned the Opposition Front Bench. Our criticism of the two proposals is not that they provide different entry points into teacher training. We have said publicly that we want different entry points into teacher training. We are concerned about the standard of qualification of those teachers at the end of training. We have spent 30 years getting teaching in Britain up to a graduate level of qualification and in our view that is of great importance to the quality of education that is delivered. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that the end result of the two alternative routes will be a graduate qualification?

Mr. Baker: Absolutely, there is no doubt about that. There is no question of watering down. I found it a little strange that at one of the large conferences, at which most of the representatives could not have been graduates because they came into the profession some time ago, it was said that this was not the right way to enter the profession. They know the problems, and we are addressing the solutions.

As I said at the outset, I am glad to say that this is not a matter of party political controversy. This is an important day for education because we will be implementing the beginning of the national curriculum. I am glad that an issue which underwent a great deal of controversial debate because it extended over a general election has now reached a great measure of consensus and I know that there are other more controversial issues in our education reforms. I commend the orders to the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Both Front Bench spokesmen broadened the debate and I understand the reasons for that. However, I remind the House that we should be debating mathematics and science in the national curriculum.

12.31 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The debate is significant, for the reasons given by the Secretary of State. No doubt in due course we shall discuss English and other subjects. Therefore, it is appropriate to reflect on the two subjects before us and on some of the general difficulties that have occurred in reaching this stage in the replanning of the education syllabus.

As the Secretary of State will be aware, one of the concerns passed on to us by those in the teaching profession is that they are in the middle of substantial changes. They have just adapted, usually successfully, to the GCSE and they are now concerned that, to make a good showing in introducing the national curriculum in the autumn they should have the necessary resources. Therefore, it is appropriate that the debate is as much about resources as about content. Without the resources, the ability to deliver the new curriculum will not be achieved.

One of the immediate problems faced by teachers is the difficulty of finding time to prepare for September. From all the evidence and publicity, it seems that the problem of finding free time to prepare for the national curriculum is not insubstantial. Teachers need to allocate some of their non-contact time to prepare for the substantial differences to be introduced into their working lives in the autumn. They are still waiting—the Secretary of State did not mention this, but I hope that the Minister will—for the advice promised to them on 3 March by the National Curriculum Council in relation to the implementation of the national curriculum. That is especially important in primary schools. As I understand it, that advice has not yet been forthcoming. Although they have the curriculum—the hard core material—they do not yet have advice about its implementation. That is the second important component. If teachers are to prepare their work schedules for September, they need to be given advice fairly early, as many pressures are imposed on them by examinations, and so on.

As the Secretary of State and the Minister are aware, the resource problems in the subjects that we are discussing today are among the most acute in our school system. It would be inappropriate to deal at length with the general problem of teacher shortages. The constituency of the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science is, like my own, in the London region, and she will be aware that the shortage of maths and science teachers is two and a half times worse in London than in the rest of the country. A quarter of shortages in secondary school teachers are in maths and science. That is scarcely a persuasive backdrop to a system that will come into force in less than six months.

The problem is made worse by a shortage of trainee teachers to fill the gaps. It is no good the Government pretending that there is no problem, because there is, and it will affect a substantial number of schools throughout the land. What will be the effect of such shortages on the curriculum? How will it be possible for the curriculum to be properly taught? The answer is that it will not, and the problem is made worse by the dichotomy in the science curriculum.

A further problem, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), is the lack of Government commitment to do what they said they wanted to do. The Government began by saying that 20 per cent. of the curriculum must be devoted to science, but realised that they could not deliver and resiled from that and considered the model B option of 12·5 per cent. because of a shortage not only of people but of equipment, and a lack of finance.

I have asked one or two questions, which revealed that there is a shortage not only of staff but of laboratories and equipment too. On average, there are six laboratories for a school of 1,000 pupils. If the reality is that between 10 and 20 per cent. of secondary school children do more than one science subject for GCSE, if the average in the fourth and fifth year is that each pupil studies just over one science subject, and if we were to obtain the objective of 20 per cent. of the curriculum being science—that is, two subjects per pupil—an increase in resources of 80 per cent. will immediately be needed to teach it. That would involve not only extra laboratories but extra equipment for them, which works out at about £50,000 per school.

I listened carefully to the Secretary of State, but I did not hear one word of encouragement to the effect that there will be substantial investment in laboratories, equipment or building for our secondary schools this autumn. A teacher recently suggested to me that it was hypocritical for the Government to introduce the national curriculum and to say that schools had to comply with its requirements without giving them the tools to get on with the job.

In addition, many primary school teachers are insufficiently qualified to teach maths and science. Figures reveal that only 4 per cent. of primary school teachers have a post-A-level qualification in maths, and only 7 per cent. have a post-A-level qualification in science, compared with 16 per cent. for English, so we do not have the personnel with the specific qualities that are needed to make the new curriculum work effectively.

The Secretary of State's examples of the new schemes with which to bring in new teachers, although good in theory, do not seem to be working in practice. Opposition Members have criticised the bursary scheme and the Minister has admitted—albeit only in the last week or two—that the bursary scheme in sciences and maths was not succeeding.

I am surprised to hear the Secretary of State say that representatives from London boroughs have pleaded with him for the licensed teachers scheme to come into operation. I cannot believe that anybody thinks that people will leave highly paid City jobs to teach permanently in schools. I could understand a scheme of secondment, as practised in other areas, but to imagine that people will change careers for a lower salary seems substantially self-deluding.

There are specific reasons for believing that, although it is not inappropriate to move towards the national curriculum, this autumn we shall be unable to do so effectively or with confidence. We do not have the resources to do so, because the Government have failed to supply them. I shall therefore advise my colleagues to vote against the orders.

12.41 am

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): This is a welcome debate and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science on having made so much progress in bringing forward the national curriculum. That is a major achievement.

I shall first raise the baffling issue of why the Labour party has decided to vote against the Government. At the end of the debate we may see a change of heart on its part because the grounds for a vote are remarkably insubstantial. As I understand it, the Labour party intends to vote against the orders because the Government propose a two-tier system to cover science. Underlying that motive I suspect that there is an ideological hang-up—an objection to two tiers in anything—rather than a careful and precise analysis of the matter.

It certainly seems reasonable that, in the early stages of bringing forward the national curriculum, we should be prepared to have some flexibility. It does not worry me that some children will spend 20 per cent. of their time on science, and others only 12·5 per cent. I accept that there may be a problem of teacher shortages. As the House knows, the Select Committee on Education is considering the supply of teachers for the 1990s. As Chairman of that Committee, I do not intend to try to anticipate our findings at this stage. We must pay some regard to the realities of the resources. However, I have no profound objection to the basic principle of some children doing more science than others.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister comment on the extent to which teachers have been involved in the preparation and implementation of the national curriculum? One complaint about educational policy over the past few years has been that teachers have not been sufficiently involved. Whatever the merits of that argument, it is of great importance and interest to the House to know whether teachers have been involved in working parties. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can guide the House on that.

In opening the debate, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), said—I sympathise with this—that the crucial aspect in testing in education is not so much absolute attainment as the value added. That remark has much to be said for it. Anybody who is interested in education will share that view. However, one of the merits of the introduction of a system of testing attainment over the years is that it gives us a chance to measure the value added as education takes place. The people who are concerned that testing will merely be some kind of crude rat race should ponder the fact that we now have a mechanism to determine not only what is achieved but the way in which achievement relates to those who may have started from a low level or from a background of difficult social circumstances but who, because they attend good schools, can gain something positive. Testing will give us a clearer idea of when that occurs.

To some extent, the primary education side of all this has been rather underrated. As I have thought about the problems of possible shortages of teachers, it has seemed

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to me that, particularly at the upper end of the primary scale, there may be more serious problems than have been recognised.

The hon. Member for Blackburn referred to the possibility of streaming in primary schools. That does not especially concern me; it is something that the schools must work out for themselves. If they have only one entry form, they are unlikely to go in for much streaming. But if they have two, and feel that the best way of using their teaching staff is the introduction of some sort of streaming, we should not get involved in laying down the law on what they should be doing. We should rely on the heads of these schools to work out what is best in the circumstances.

Another point about primary education that has been borne in on me only comparatively recently is that these new stages of education may make life rather difficult for authorities in whose schools the ages of transfer are different from the ages at which the testing will take place. In the county of Buckinghamshire, which I represent, it so happens that the ages of transfer are eight and then 12. The county is having to think rather hard about whether, in order to fit in naturally with the national curriculum, it will have to switch the ages of transfer from eight to seven and from 12 to 11. Apart from anything else, that raises considerable issues of resources. The objective is right, but I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would comment on how she sees the problem developing. Will education authorities in many parts of the country have to rethink their ages of transfer, and if so, what are the resource implications?

I repeat that I believe that we are now witnessing a real step forward, and it would be churlish and foolish to vote against what the Government are doing.

12.47 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Royal Society of Chemistry has given considerable thought to the orders, about which I want to ask three questions.

First, the Royal Society says that the orders do not, of themselves, ensure balance within the science curriculum, as no guidance is given on the relative weightings to be applied to the 16 attainment targets that contribute to the knowledge and understanding profile component. The science working group suggested weightings, and the society recommends that these weightings become part of the orders. It says that failure to make them so opens up the possibility of imbalance between the major scientific disciplines. For example, in model A, the programmes of study leading to the statements of attainment in AT8 should be much more extensive than those in AT16, yet the draft orders give no guidance to teachers and examining authorities in this matter. Do the Government accept what the society says about this?

Secondly, the society rejects model B at key stage 4. The course a pupil follows would be neither broad nor balanced. Do the Government agree with that?

Finally, the society has serious reservations about the intention to implement key stage 1 of the national curriculum in September 1989. These three issues are important, and I would welcome the Government's comments on them.

12.49 am

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I welcome the two statutory instruments setting out the place of mathematics and science in the national curriculum. I recall that, during the many meetings of the Standing Committee that considered the Education Reform Bill, we discussed the national curriculum at some length. In fairness to Opposition Members, they did not vote against it in principle, although they had some reservations about its detail. Like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, I am somewhat surprised that the Opposition now propose to vote against it. I welcome the Education Reform Act 1988 because it proves that there is life and imagination after Butler.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): The hon. Gentleman is reading from a script. Who wrote it?

Mr. Pawsey: I can assure Opposition Members that we prepare our own scripts. We do not employ the army of researchers that the Opposition have.

It is unfortunate that, while some Opposition Members can see some benefit in the national curriculum and in the mathematics and science reports, they cannot see some of the other benefits that will spring from the Education Reform Act. Mathematics and science are important subjects. It is right that they should play an important part in school life and that ample time should be provided for their teaching and development. Increasingly, mathematics and science will play a larger part in the life of an individual when he or she leaves school and starts to earn a living.

I do not share the concern of Opposition Members who spoke about option B in the report of the National Curriculum Council. That option gives more flexibility to the school curriculum. It allows more time for other subjects, reduces specialisation at too early an age, and reduces the risk of forcing children into some form of science straitjacket that may permanently alienate them and push them from science for ever. Option B gives a balanced programme, with physics, chemistry and biology. It recognises that attainment targets as a whole represent a link, a balance, between practical work and knowledge.

The national curriculum operates only on children from the age of 16 so that young people can then start to specialise with A levels. Option B keeps doors open and education best takes place in a disciplined environment and in some schools that discipline is lacking for the teaching of the national curriculum. I hope that the Minister will give some thought to how the subject of teaching itself is taught in some of our colleges. I hope that he will persuade those who produce the syllabus in those colleges to build in more classroom practice.

The national curriculum and science and mathematics need teachers. Opposition Members, such as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), have said that there is a shortage of teachers. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, overall there are sufficient teachers. I acknowledge that in some areas and in some subjects there may be difficulties. However, they should not be overstated because the number of vacancies fell by about 20 per cent. between 1987 and 1988.

The Secretary of State spoke about recruitment for initial teacher training, which in 1988 was a record. That underlines an earlier point that training must be right.

Social theory is okay, but it is a poor substitute for classroom practice. I welcome the action taken by my right hon. Friend on combating the perceived teacher shortage. I welcome the more flexible use of starting salaries and incentive allowances, the more active recruitment, more part-time working and, above all, the encouragement of former teachers to return to the profession. My right hon. Friend's policies are indeed proving successful. The success of the national curriculum will hinge on an adequate supply of well motivated teachers who are able to teach maths and science and other subjects. My right hon. Friend is ensuring that the existing difficulties are resolved —and in good time.

12.55 am

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I appreciate that this debate has to be brief. It is about national curriculum attainment targets, with specific reference to maths and science. The national curriculum will be plagued by teacher shortages. Indeed, the education inspectors themselves have warned, in written evidence to the Education and Science Select Committee, that unless the country gets the supply of teachers right, delivery of the Government's reforms will be jeopardised. The inspectors said that, without that, the rest would fail.

Both maths and science have been shown to be areas in which there are particular problems of teacher shortages. Research at Manchester university produced an optimistic forecast—that by 1995 the shortage of maths teachers would be 4,141. *The Times Educational Supplement* of 31 March, on the other hand, in a pessimistic forecast, said that the shortfall would be 12,232—55·7 per cent.

In Waltham Forest, which is in my area, people are already suffering those teacher shortages. I have received many letters. Because of the need for brevity, I cannot quote all of them, but I shall refer to one or two. Mr. Loseby, of Scotts road, Leyton, said:

"Children are being denied the right to a basic education. Young lives and futures are at risk through no fault of their own."

He said that children were being denied access to learning. A Mrs. Turner, whose child attends Beaumont primary school, said of her child:

"Since Christmas she has had only four days' tuition a week, and last week was refused admittance to the school on three separate days."

I have received many letters like that.

In February the chief education officer wrote to me saying that there were approximately 90 full-time vacancies, that 12 teachers were on maternity leave, and that three were on long-term sickness leave. Only 40 of those could be covered by patchwork methods of employing casual supply teachers, who do not really want to be employed on that basis. The borough's response—it gives a long list, which again I cannot read out tonight —has been acknowledged and welcomed by Ken Young of the teacher supply division of the Department of Education and Science itself.

What is needed, as the borough has made clear to the Government, is a five-point action plan; a national recruitment drive for primary teachers; an increase in the number of college training places; an increase in the number of college training places; an increase in the London weighting; a redrawing of the boundaries to include outer boroughs like mine, with inner-London problems, so that they can pay the higher allowance; an increase in the number of incentive allowances; and positive action to train nore black and ethnic minority teachers. But something must be done about pay. In particular, there must be higher pay for those teaching in areas where there is high-cost housing.

As early-day motion 548 says, the Government need to face up to their responsibility by providing substantial extra funds for teachers' salaries and for the provision of creche and nursery places so that teachers may be enabled to return to the profession. These and all other finances must be provided so that our education system may enjoy provision similar to that which is enjoyed by the systems of our major industrial competitors. If the Government do not put up the cash, these serious teacher shortages will really take hold, and the national curriculum will be sabotaged.

12.58 am

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I shall concentrate on the order relating to science. I should like to make four points and to put four suggestions to the Minister.

First, there has been comment from both sides of the House about the need to develop a national curriculum that achieves the widest possible consensus. The divisions that have been demonstrated in this debate are important, but they are not the real meat of party political politics. It seems to me that we are likely to run into deeper divisions when we turn to some of the other subjects in relation to the national curriculum. I think of English and history, and one or two other subjects may fall into the same category.

I want to offer the Minister a constructive suggestion, which may enable us to move forward with consensus. Would it not be sensible to have a debate in this House when draft orders are published? A debate without a vote would enable the views of the House of Commons to be heard before publication of the final order. We all know what the outcome of tonight's vote will be, and we all realise that that restricts debate. If we could have had this debate at an earlier stage, perhaps Members of Parliament could have helped to shape the order, and could have influenced the development of consensus in relation to the national curriculum. I offer that to the Minister as a constructive suggestion.

I have three other points to raise. First, there has been widespread concern on this side of the House about resources for delivering science and the national curriculum. Those resources questions come in two forms. The first is about teachers, and whether there will be enough, and of the right quality. We need to ensure that we have sufficient teachers into the 1990s, and that those teachers are properly qualified, and teach in the subjects for which they are qualified.

The second aspect of resources was mentioned by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). It is that, if we extend the scientific provision within the curriculum, there will be implications for resources in terms of books, laboratories, and scientific equipment. Is the Minister satisfied that we shall have the teachers to deliver science in the curriculum? What provision will the Minister make for resources so that youngsters will have real opportunities in scientific experience and learning?

The next question is one on which we should have spent more time in the Committee that considered the Education Reform Bill. That is the process of delivering not only

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science teaching but other subjects. Hon. Members often comment on the fact that youngsters drop out of certain subjects at a certain age. I still do not think that we have paid sufficient attention to the reasons why that happens, or to what steps will be taken to make sure that interest is maintained among those youngsters until the age of 16. It is not just automatic, and we must consider those processes.

At the heart of the debate is two-tier science. I always listen with interest when the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) speaks on education. However, I think that he got it wrong tonight, for two reasons. First, he let the cat slightly out of the bag when he said that the development of two-tier science must take place with some regard to the reality of resources. The fear in our schools is that two-tier science will enable the Government to conceal the inadequacy of the resources that they will make available.

Secondly, what the right hon. Gentleman called a bit of flexibility may turn out to be an agenda of low ambition on science. Too many of our youngsters will take second-tier, and what may be deemed second-rate, science. As has been said, too many of the girls will do that. If the agenda is set too low, instead of the scientific revolution in our schools to which the Secretary of State referred, there will be an agenda of low ambition, and an impoverishment of the teaching and learning of science.

I hope that the Minister will answer my questions about resourcing, about the process and, above all else, about the fear that there will be two-tier science, two-tier teaching of science, and two-tier youngsters as a result. That is why we shall be voting against the science order.

1.3 am

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I am glad to be able to take part in tonight's debate. It has been serious, and hon. Members have made some important points. As we know, it is the first of many debates in which we shall discuss the national curriculum and what happens in schools. As the daughter of a scientist, I shall be addressing some of the questions that have been raised about science, and also some of the questions raised by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), both about the level of resources and about having the right number of teachers.

I shall start by answering various important questions taking up some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). He claimed that model B, the 12·5 per cent. provision, would not provide a sufficient basis for future study up to A-level for some pupils. He told us that the NCC said that the 12·5 per cent. course would provide quite a good basis for further study. It added, however, that there may need to be a short bridging course if a student wished to go beyond the model and study for A-level. The hon. Gentleman's argument was not quite so devastating as he suggested.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), along with the hon. Member for Blackburn, wanted to know what would not be covered in model B. They referred to attainment target 2, which deals with the variety of life, target 5, the human influences on earth, target 7, the making of new materials, target 12, information technology, target 15, light and electromagnetic radiation, target 16, earth and space, and target 17, the nature of science. Targets 5 and 16 will in part be covered by geography. We must remember that the science curriculum is set out substantially to cover the whole of science, but there are other subjects that will be studied. I refer to the core subjects and the foundation subjects, such as geography, history and, most importantly, design technology.

I remind hon. Members that targets 5 and 16 will in part be covered by the geography curriculum. Targets 12 and 7 will certainly be covered in part by the design technology curriculum. Target 2 will in part be covered by target 3 and target 17 will in part be covered by history. Contrary to what has been alleged, nothing will be left out in model B, which is the shorter course. It is essential to reiterate the words of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, that model B does not represent a soft alternative. It does not represent anything remotely like the sort of science that many girls now study, which means simply taking biology. If girls take model B in the belief that it will prove to be a soft alternative, they will find themselves in for quite a surprise. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we want the majority of students to study the 20 per cent. model, and we want schools to allow that to happen.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): There is much talk about the 12·5 per cent. and 20 per cent. models, but will my hon. Friend confirm that the Education Reform Act 1988 makes no specific mention of percentages? Therefore, there is an inbuilt flexibility for headmasters and schools to teach as much or as little science as they wish, given the guidelines.

Mrs. Rumbold: To a certain extent, my hon. Friend is correct. It is essential that all children should study the core and foundation subjects. As the NCC has made recommendations, and as the House will make recommendations, it is to be hoped that we shall see the majority of children, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, studying the 20 per cent. model. For some children, however, there will be the opportunity, for particular reasons, to take the 12·5 per cent. model if that is what they wish.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow told us that the Royal Society of Chemistry is in a tizz about weightings. The amount of time that is spent on each attainment target is a matter for a teacher's judgment. Weightings of science attainment subjects are not appropriate to be considered along with the terms of the order because they relate very much to assessment. The views of the working group have been put to the School Examinations and Assessment Council, which is responsible for developing assessment arrangements. I advise the hon. Member for Blackburn that saying 30:30:30 for physics, chemistry and biology does not show a recognition of how the three subjects are blended into the attainment targets for science.

I turn now to primary school streaming which has also been referred to. The circular states that it is possible for some very bright children to study with older pupils, but there is no reason why they should be moved up or down because nothing is said in the circular about streaming. The NCC bulletin states that grouping by ages is primarily for the schools to undertake. In primary schools that may not be the most effective way to proceed but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison)

sensibly said, it is a matter for the heads to consider. I agree with him in that I am not absolutely convinced that it is reasonable or sensible for us to vote on the matter of the two-tier system. I thank him for his sensible words and agree with his proposition that it seems nonsense to say that it would be unreasonable to have some form of flexibility.

My right hon. Friend also referred to the age of transfer and said that it is for the local education authority and the school governors to decide whether to make statutory proposals to change the age range of their schools. The national curriculum key stages take account of the common ages of transfer between infant, junior and secondary schools but they do not necessarily require areas with a middle school system with transfer ages of, say, 12 or 13, to change to a transfer age of 11. The reporting of the assessment of pupils' achievements at the key ages of seven, 11, 14 and 16 can take place, regardless of the age of transfer between the schools. The programmes of study are designed to underpin the work that pupils do as they progress from one level of attainment to the next, regardless of the age group and range of the school that they attend.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) mentioned the allocation of resources. He asked about teachers and about general resources in buildings. The capital allocations have been increased to £352 million, with substantial education support grant funds now being made available to back up the introduction of our national curriculum. In the current year—1989-90—£130 million is available and can be used on laboratories and on books, just as the local education authority thinks fit.

It is also important to note that the National Curriculum Council has given preliminary advice to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, which was published in its recent circular No. 3. More work is now being done and there has been substantial training——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [14th April].*

The House divided: Ayes 81, Noes 142.

Division No. 160] **[1.12 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Armstrong, Hilary
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Straw, Jack
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Bright, Graham
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*

Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Fallon and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wallace, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Mersey Tunnels (Finances)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

1.23 am

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): The financial position of the Mersey tunnels is not merely a Wirral or Liverpool issue. It affects the ratepayers of Merseyside and, indeed, will affect poll tax payers from next year. It is, in basic terms, a desperate position. The estimated income from the tolls for the two tunnels amounts to £12·1 million for 1989-90, and the estimated expenditure for the same period—taking into account operating costs of £6·5 million, asset financing of £4·8 million and debt charges on capitalised deficits of £9·6 million—amount to £20·9 million. That leaves a deficit of £8·8 million to be picked up by Merseyside ratepayers.

The problem has implications for future years as well. In Knowsley, the estimated total cost to ratepayers from 1988 to 2002, if no action is taken to resolve the problems, is £7·7 million.

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): The Euro-MP for Humberside is seeking, through the Commission, to introduce legislation that would ensure that the tolls on all roads, bridges and tunnels are removed by 1991. The figure for Liverpool as a whole is £23·8 million for the same four-year period. Liverpool ratepayers will have to shoulder that burden. In addition, the tolls amount to £35 million. Liverpool ratepayers, and those in Knowsley and other boroughs in the area, will have to shoulder a total burden of £58·8 million. Does that not reinforce my hon. Friend's argument that tolls should be scrapped and that the Government ought to pay the debts that have been incurred?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Urgent action needs to be taken. The Humber bridge is an example to which we ought to return. The Liverpool problem is mirrored by that in Knowsley. Only 1 per cent. of Knowsley residents regularly use the tunnel.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Sefton ratepayers will have to foot a £14 million bill between 1988 and 2002, as well as a bill of £11·25 million for tolls? Does he think that now is the time to get rid of tolls altogether? The Mersey tunnel has become part of the national road network. That would relieve ratepayers of the debt that has been incurred and of the tolls that they have to pay when they use the tunnel. Ratepayers would then get a square deal. At the moment a precept is being levied that ought not to be forced on them.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman makes a point on behalf of all the borough of Sefton that applies with equal force to all Merseyside districts.

The origin of the problem goes back to the 1960s when the volume of cross-river traffic in 1982 was estimated to be 130,000 vehicles a day. In reality, however, the actual flow in 1982 turned out to be only 60,000 vehicles. The implications in terms of tolls are clear. No doubt some people will advance the superficial argument that those who use the tunnels should bear the cost. That is very much the argument that the Prime Minister seems to be advancing for the Channel tunnel. However, Merseytravel, which is responsible for the operation of the

tunnels, was waiting until today for permission from the Secretary of State for its current proposals, which would increase tolls from 50p to 60p for cars, from 50p to £1·20 for medium-sized goods vehicles and from £1·20 to £1·80 for heavy goods vehicles. Those tolls would be indexed to meet future rises in inflation.

Merseytravel has received a letter today that gives permission for the toll increases. Paragraph 7 of the letter, however, seems to argue against the permission granted by the Secretary of State. It suggests that the toll increases are insufficient and that there has been no substantial settlement of the problem.

Free toll crossings are not just a political issue. The Merseyside chamber of commerce argues that

"Tolls inflate the overheads of road transport operators in areas where there is a toll crossing and constitutes an expenditure which similar companies in other parts of the country do not have to bear."

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does my hon. Friend not agree that it is inequitable that Humberside ratepayers are not required to pay the full cost of the Humber crossing, despite the fact that, unlike the Mersey tunnel crossings, two inner-city areas are not linked? The Mersey tunnels are vital because they form part of the national network. They are also part of the regeneration of Merseyside. That can be achieved only if the Government provide for the cost of the tunnels. If they mean what they say about aid for the inner cities, they should be helping with the tunnels.

Mr. Howarth: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, which supports my argument.

The chamber of commerce said:

"The money spent by citizens on this part of their rate bills, coupled with toll expenditure itself, effectively removes some funds from the local economy to the disbenefit of all".

There is also the argument about fairness as between major conurbations to which my hon. Friends have referred. The comparison can be made between Merseyside and Glasgow, another conurbation divided by a river. In Glasgow all the crossings are free with the exception of the Erskine bridge, which is operated by the Scottish Office, and the Scottish Office is currently seeking to effect a reduction in tolls for the purpose of economic regeneration. Similarly, Greater London—also divided by a river—has many free crossings and only one toll crossing, the Dartford tunnel.

There has been a great deal of talk about this problem for many years but to date the Government have shown little or no interest in any action. The Government are currently urging Merseytravel to provide a reasoned case for a solution, yet all the evidence necessary already exists. As recently as October 1987 the then Mersey passenger transport authority published the document "Merseyside Tunnels—the case for Government assistance", which sets out the situation clearly and comprehensively. In December 1988, in evidence provided to a public local inquiry, William Austin Varney presented a very detailed account of the situation. It is disingenuous of the Government to pretend that they need more information.

I understand that the Department of Transport recently suggested five options. First, it suggested that tolls could be increased. That suggestion has been agreed today. Merseytravel has made the application and the decision has been made, but it smacks of evasion. There was a long delay in reaching the decision, and many of us do not agree that it was the right solution.

The Department then suggested that the deficit could be capitalised, but the Government know full well that there is no legislative framework which would enable Merseytravel to do that without specific Government permission.

The Department's third suggestion was an interest holiday, but as all the debt on the Mersey tunnels is outstanding—to the Department of Transport or the public works loan board—that, too, would require specific Government decisions.

Fourthly, the Department suggested writing off some or all of the debt. That avenue should be pursued. There is a precedent in the form of the Humber bridge which has had two thirds of its debt written off.

Finally, the Department has suggested precepting which would take us no further, as the Merseyside ratepayers would be picking up the tab again.

There is no doubt in my mind that Merseysiders are being unfairly treated on this issue. The current state of affairs puts Merseyside at a distinct disadvantage in comparison with Humberside, Glasgow and Greater London. It is high time that the Government stopped evading the issue and agreed a solution that would not place an unfair disadvantage on the ratepayers of Merseyside or on the local economy. Sadly, the latest decision, received today, does not achieve that. The time for talk, reports, studies and inquiries is over and the Government should act to solve the problem now.

1.33 am

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Peter Bottomley): I note that a number of hon. Members have participated in the Adjournment debate of the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth). The House will wish to acknowledge the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) who has been assiduous in putting the case to me. It was not my hon. Friend, however, who was asking for a contribution of £4,000 a year from the disabled people who, I note, Merseytravel will now require to pay. We are talking about debts of £114 million, and it does not seem obvious that suddenly to require the 200 disabled people who use the tunnels regularly to contribute is the way forward. The hon. Gentleman did not mention that in his remarks, and I refer him to the press notice from Merseytravel of 7 April this month.

Saturday's edition of the *Liverpool Echo*, the last piece of journalism before the ghastly tragedy at Hillsborough —I extend my personal sympathy to people in Liverpool and Merseyside as, having been present at the Heysel stadium in 1985, I am aware of the effects that the disaster will have on local people—contains an article entitled, "Tunnel Vision" which describes something

"despicable, deplorable—and downright shameful".

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North has talked about the size of the overall debt. It might be useful to the House if I go through some of the history in the hope that it will be possible to find a way forward which depends on proper discussion.

The Mersey tunnels have been built and operated as tolled crossings under legislation promoted by the local authorities that dates back to 1925. In this respect they are not unique: other major tolled crossings such as the Tyne tunnels, the Dartford tunnels and the Humber bridge were promoted in the same way.

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

In the Government's response in July 1986 to the report of the transport committee on tolled crossings, we emphasised that tolled crossings should be the responsibility of the local authorities which promoted them. Those local authorities accepted tolls as the best means of getting the required crossings without placing an intolerable burden on ratepayers. They financed construction by borrowing, with the intention of servicing, and ultimately repaying, those loans from toll revenue. We pointed out that these obligations were freely incurred by those local authorities.

Mr. Terry Fields: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Bottomley: Briefly, but I hope that it will not be catching.

Mr. Fields: Does the Minister accept that at least part of the responsibility for the Mersey tunnels lies with the Department of Transport? The decision to build a second toll tunnel was based on projections of traffic volume which proved to be highly inaccurate. Therefore, the Department is responsible for encouraging the building of the second tunnel and backing it at the time.

Mr. Bottomley: If we were to debate responsibilities for everything that has happened in and around Merseyside and in Liverpool itself, we should be having a debate which lasted rather longer than the allocated time for an Adjournment debate.

We do not accept that local authorities should now be relieved of those obligations because toll revenue has not been as high as expected, or because they may be reluctant to increase charges, except for the 200 disabled people.

Mr. Howarth: That is a cheap point.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman says, "That is a cheap point," but £4,000 a year compared with £114 millions a year seems to justify some of the comments in the *Liverpool Echo*.

Mr. Terry Fields: Do not believe the *Liverpool Echo*.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman, from the back row says, "Do not believe the *Liverpool Echo*." Perhaps I should believe the press notice from Merseytravel on 7 April, but perhaps that was not in the hon. Gentleman's briefing.

We went on to make it clear that the Government could not accept that they should simply write off the debts of tolled crossings. We have said that we accept that there may need to be exceptions to that policy and we are willing to consider reasoned argument for special treatment in particular cases. The Humber bridge is one. We are even now considering the report by the inspector who held a public inquiry into proposals by the Humber bridge board for a toll increase. When that has been decided by the Secretary of State, we shall consider the carefully reasoned case by the Humber bridge board for writing off a proportion of that bridge's debts which cannot be met from tolls, or from other sources available to them under the Humber Bridge Act.

We stand by our statement in the response to the Transport Committee, that if other crossing authorities consider they face similar problems to Humber, albeit on a lesser scale, we would be willing to consider with them their financial projections and proposals for alleviating their problems. We would expect those authorities to have exhausted the possibilities of their enabling legislation.

Those statements of Government policy set the background against which the financial position of the Mersey tunnels has to be judged. What has the Mersey tunnels authority done since the summer of 1986—nearly three years ago—in response to that statement?

There have been a series of meetings between officials of my Department and the Merseyside passenger transport authority about the tunnels' finances. Early in 1987 the authority appeared to accept that, with the approaching end of the power to capitalise deficits, there was a need for urgent action to deal with the tunnels' debts and that a substantial toll increase was likely to be required, as well as some measure of precepting of local ratepayers. It was explained to the PTA that any further use by the Secretary of State of his power to approve capitalisation before the power ends in December 1989 would depend on it preparing a package of measures which would place the tunnel on a sound financial footing.

At a further meeting in June 1987, it was agreed that the PTA would produce a range of options for improving the finances of the tunnels comprising tolls increases and some precepting. At another meeting, in July 1987, the Department's officials stressed the need for detailed proposals so that the need for assistance to meet any residual problem could be assessed. Later that month, officials wrote to the PTA asking for a package of options for the long-term financing of the tunnels, including financial projections to, say, the year 2000. They also asked the authority to make it clear whether it would propose any extension of capitalisation powers, or any other special treatment of the debt. They stressed that the measures should be realistic.

The next we heard from the PTA was in September 1987. It planned to canvass various options of toll increases for various amounts, including toll increases to 60p, 70p, 80p or £1 for cars and equivalent amounts for other vehicles. It envisaged a consultation period up to the end of that year. The PTA said it intended to prepare a case for Government assistance. To assess the effects of higher tolls and higher precepting on the transport system of Merseyside, a cross-river survey would be set in hand.

In October 1987 we received a copy of the PTA's consultation paper and a request for Government assistance. That request did not contain a package of options or long-term financial projections. In December 1987, officials of the Department had another meeting with the PTA, and offered assistance in constructing long-term financial projections.

At the same time, the PTA was informed by letter of the decision of the Secretary of State that the power to capitalise interest charges should be extended for only six months until 30 September 1988. This was intended to give a breathing space for the PTA to come forward with suitable solutions. It was also felt that capitalisation, which is akin to paying a mortgage with a credit card, would not help in providing an answer to the mounting debts.

From early 1988 onwards, the Department was closely involved with the PTA in producing long-term toll projections to help it prepare a case for Government assistance. In February 1988, we learned that the PTA proposed to increase tolls only to the extent that the car

toll would be raised from 50p to 60p, with increases also for other classes of traffic. That was hardly a major step towards resolving the debt problem.

The order was published in April 1988 and on 15 June the Department was told that objections had been received. Arrangements were made in early August for a public inquiry, which took place in December. The inspector's report was received on 30 March this year. On 14 April the Department issued the letter setting out the Secretary of State's decision approving the toll increases proposed. I would add that a year is not an exceptional time for processing a toll increase. A decision on the 7 December 1984 tolls order could not be reached until 25 July 1986.

The PTA was meanwhile making little progress in preparing a package of options, although the Department continued to help in the production of long-term projections. We were surprised when the PTA presented its 1989-92 expenditure plan to the Secretary of State in July 1988 to find that it contained a proposal that we should write off £80 million of the tunnels' debts. There was no indication as to how that amount had been derived. It did not arise out of any assessment of the sort of tolls tunnel users could be asked to bear or the charges that local taxpayers could be expected to meet for the sake of the benefit the tunnels provide. It did not arise out of any of the projections which the Department had spent time helping to produce. We found in fact that it was no more than the PTA's pro-rata calculation of the amount it thought the Government would write off on the Humber bridge. The fact that the Government had not, and still have not, reached a decision on the amount of the Humber bridge debts to be written off was deliberately overlooked. That is not what anyone can regard as responsible financial management.

The Department nevertheless persisted in its attempts to find the basis for some agreed options. A further meeting on 23 August 1988 considered the projections that had jointly been produced. The PTA was again asked to consider a range of options for putting the tunnels on to a sound financial footing. It was suggested that these could comprise various elements. The first was further tolls increases, by, say, 1 October 1990, at about the present real value of the 1971 Kingsway first bore operating toll. The second alternative was the financing of deficiencies through the PTA's precept on its constituent authorities. A third option was the extension of powers to capitalise interest not serviced by the operating account as a short-term measure up to December 1989, or in the longer-term, which would require fresh legislation. A fourth option was a possible debt charge holiday on the Department's loan, thus reducing the demands on the tunnels' finances by up to £2·662 million per annum for a specified period, or, fifthly, the write-off of debt, which would be the last resort.

The Department asked to have the PTA's proposals by the end of September 1988, but nothing arrived. We are still waiting. On 26 October, we received a letter from the clerk to the authority reiterating that the authority's package of proposals was the tolls increase that had been proposed, the writing-off of £80 million of debt—which, as I have said, had no reasonable basis and was quite unacceptable—and future tolls increases, perhaps every third year, to keep the proposed 60p toll in line with inflation. The clerk said:

"any other option does not constitute Authority policy."

So that was that, with no suggestion of willingness to proffer other options, and there the matter has had to rest. Because of the Secretary of State's role in determining the recent tolls increase application, we were unable to hold further discussions with the PTA between the closing of the public inquiry in December and the Secretry of State's decision.

The Secretary of State has now reached his decision on the tolls increase, which can be implemented. As the authority well knows, this increase will not put it on the road to reasonably early financial recovery. We have seen the projections put to the inquiry. They include calculations based on options other than the toll increase to 60p, which was put to the inquiry. They are of little use if the authority is unwilling to offer to implement them.

This is a sorry story. A cynical man might divine some procrastination on the authority's part. Why is it that fruitful discussions were possible with the Humber bridge board, which produced a range of options which it was willing to discuss, but not with Mersey authority? Why have nearly three years of talks produced no long-term solution? A parody of the song comes to mind

"several years older, and deeper in debt".

This is no laughing matter. The policies of those responsible for the tunnels over the years have been found wanting. If, since the opening of the first of the new Mersey tunnels in 1971, tolls had kept pace with inflation, the car toll would now be 80p, not 60p; the tunnels' debts would now be £80 million not almost £120 million, and the local ratepayer would not be facing the risk of larger precepts to cover the Mersey tunnels' debts. I suspect that we would not have received a press notice from Merseytravel saying that the £4,000 saving is a necessary response to Government inflexibility and comparing it with the £40 million forgone by not keeping tolls in line with inflation since 1971.

There is common agreement among hon. Members for a speedy resolution of this matter. Officials have again arranged to meet the PTA on 28 April to discuss possible financial packages. If it is prepared to put forward a reasoned case based on a sensible assessment of the various options and is prepared to give an undertaking to do so in advance of that meeting, it can proceed. If all that it is prepared to do is to hark back to empty and unsubstantiated claims for the United Kingdom taxpayer to meet debts which it has failed to meet out of tolls or local taxation, there is little point in further discussion.

The distinction between the Humber bridge board and the Mersey authority is that the Humber bridge board has been willing to hold serious and detailed discussions. The Government are willing to assist the PTA with its problems if the need is proven, and if it can show that it has done all that could be reasonably expected to help itself. That condition has not been met so far. It must now be for the PTA to decide whether it wants to put forward proposals and enter serious discussions or to continue to wish upon the people of Merseyside continuing self-imposed financial burdens.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Wages Councils

1. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has reached any conclusions on the future of wages councils following the public consultation; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. John Cope): My hon. Friend will have seen from the answer that I gave on 21 March to a similar question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) that a decision on the future of the wages councils will be taken later this year.

Mr. Marlow: In view of the Government's massive majority last night, does my right hon. Friend feel that he will be able to secure a majority to get rid of this further legislative relic of the decaying vegetation of socialism? Can my right hon. Friend reassure the House that he has another secret and sudden Bill, dripping wet with printer's ink, to bring before an eager and expectant House?

Mr. Cope: The only assurance that I can give my hon. Friend and the House is that no final decision has yet been taken, but that it will be taken later in the year.

Mr. John Evans: Is it not a scandal that a number of employers pay their employees less than the wages councils' statutory minimum wage? If the Government abolish the wages council, what steps do they intend to take to protect people from such vicious exploitation?

Mr. Cope: Last year about 97 per cent. of the workers in wages councils industries were paid at least the minimum due. That is the result of recent inspections. However, we must also balance job prospects and numbers of jobs, as well as the considerations mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Budgen: Was not the original idea of the wages councils to protect the weakest employees who might not be able to negotiate adequately with their employers, and wast not the compromise by which young employees were taken out of the wages councils a ridiculous and illogical one? Should not the Government now move towards straightforward abolition?

Mr. Cope: It was a sensible thing to do at the time, but it is right to review the position now.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Recognising that there is once again a considerable head of steam among Conservative Members for the abolition of this so-called decaying vegetation of socialism, will the Minister explain why, in consultation exercises, virtually all those who responded from various industries were unhappy about the abolition of the wages councils?

Mr. Cope: On the contrary, in the six largest councils, which represent about 94 per cent. of all workers covered by wages councils, a majority of the employer bodies wanted abolition.

Mr. Gregory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the wages councils are anachronistic? Few Members represent people who work, for example, in the area covered by the ostrich feather and artificial fancy flower wages council?

Mr. Cope: Yes, there are a number of small wages councils in rather exotic industries.

Mines and Quarries Inspectors

2. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many mines inspectors and quarries inspectors the Health and safety Executive had in place on 1 April.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): On 1 April 1989 the Health and Safety Executive employed 58 mines inspectors and 11 quarries inspectors.

Mr. McKay: In what disciplines are the mines inspectors placed and where are the specialist services based?

Mr. Nicholls: The inspectors are trained in specialties appropriate to their tasks. It may be of particular interest to the hon. Gentleman to know that in the past three years the ratio of mines inspectors to workers in British Coal mines has improved from one to 1,790 to one to 1,679. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is a most welcome improvement.

Mr. Strang: Will the Minister acknowledge that accident rates are higher among the employees of the private contractors in British Coal collieries, and higher still among employees in the private licensed mines? The proposal to abolish the statutory health and safety responsibilities of the pit deputy is utterly unacceptable and we are not prepared to see a reduction in health and safety standards with the increase in accidents and deaths that it must entail, to prepare the way for privatisation of the industry.

Mr. Nicholls: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern on the latter point, but I know of no such proposal. I also agree that the accident rate in licensed mines, which is running at a higher rate than that in the industry generally, is a cause for concern. It is difficult to discern any particular reason for it, but certain things are clear—they tend to be smaller enterprises, in some cases technology and high technology may not be in use to the same extent, and the seams may be difficult to work. We share the hon. Gentleman's concern, and the inspectorate

has had a number of constructive meetings with the Federation of Licensed Mines to see whether anything can be done.

Training and Enterprise Councils

3. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received from chambers of commerce on his proposals to introduce training and enterprise councils.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): Since the White Paper "Employment for the 1990s" was published on 5 December last year, almost 4,000 individuals and organisations have expressed an interest in training and enterprise councils. Of these, 87 approaches have been from chambers of commerce.

Mr. Nicholson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that industry contributes some £15 billion per year in training employees and that the extra £3 billion from the Government, plus the direction of training being given to industry, will be a recipe for success? Does he agree, however, that the continuing support and working co-operation of local business as represented separately by bodies such as chambers of commerce, is also essential for success?

Mr. Fowler: I entirely agree with both the points that my hon. Friend, with his considerable experience of the chamber of commerce movement, has put to me. Employers are now investing more than £18 billion a year in training. That is a substantial increase, but I entirely agree that the success of training and enterprise councils will depend heavily on the support that they receive not just from employers but from everyone in the local community.

Mr. Wallace: I am sure that the Secretary of State is anxious that the business men who come forward should be of the highest calibre, but is he not concerned that many of them, as a result of their success, will not have the time to devote to training? What quality control procedure will there be to ensure the standard of training provision is of a uniformly high standard throughout the country, and not patchy, with variations from area to area?

Mr. Fowler: National standards of training will, of course, continue. That is crucially important. Training and enterprise councils, however, are concerned with the local delivery of training. I believe that our proposals will enable leaders of business locally to be used, as it were, as boards of directors while Training Agency staff can be seconded to the councils. In that way, we shall have the best of both worlds.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the tragedies of training has been that the trade unions have helped to destroy the apprenticeship system, because they wanted young people to be paid too much of the skilled wage at the beginning? Is there any more accord now? Do the trade unions intend to help the scheme on its way so that people will be trained and have real jobs when they have finished that training?

Mr. Fowler: I very much hope that that is the case. Training and enterprise councils have not been a matter of controversy between Government and trade unions or, indeed, with other organisations. One of the areas in which the councils should work quickly and well is my hon. Friend's own city of Birmingham, where employers and unions have a good working relationship, and I should like to see that continue.

Mr. Meacher: After the fiascos of the job training scheme, which achieved only a quarter of its targeted number of places, and employment training, which achieved only half the targeted number, why should the training and enterprise councils do any better when they have no extra funding, unbalanced and unrepresentative membership, and no public accountability for the public funds provided?

Mr. Fowler: The most indicative thing about the hon. Gentleman is that he seeks to attack every training initiative that has been made over the past two years. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I will give the hon. Gentleman the facts, so that he will know them in future. The fact is that some 180,000 people are now on employment training schemes. They have taken absolutely no notice of the hon. Gentleman's advice, and I advise the public to do the same.

Labour Statistics

4. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the fall in unemployment in the east midlands during the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. John Lee): In the 12 months to March 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the east midlands fell by 34,500 or 22·6 per cent. on a consistent basis. Unemployment in the east midlands is now at its lowest level for more than eight years, as it is in the country as a whole.

Mr. Tredinnick: Has my hon. Friend noted the astonishing fall in unemployment in my constituency of Bosworth of 41 per cent. in the past 12 months? Does he agree that that success is partly due to the policies of Hinckley and Bosworth borough council, the Conservative-controlled council with the lowest rates in the east midlands? Does he further agree that that trend is reflected throughout the east midlands?

Mr. Lee: I agree with all that my hon. Friend has said. The civilian work force in the east midlands is 1,844,000 —the highest level ever.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister tell us the real unemployment figure, without the 19 different fiddles that he has introduced? When does he estimate that the unemployment figures will get back to 1979 levels?

Mr. Lee: Unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency in the two years to March 1989 has fallen by 29·1 per cent.

Mr. Boswell: Has my hon. Friend noticed that unemployment in the two years to March 1989 has fallen to a new low? Has he any explanation as to how that could have happened?

Mr. Lee: I can only assume that it is a combination of the Government's economic policy and the very sound judgment of my hon. Friend's constituents when they elected him as their Member of Parliament.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that there have been a number of pit closures in my constituency of Ashfield because of his Government's policy? Is he aware that at Stanton Hill in my constituency the pit is to close in August and there is no other industry? What is the Department of Employment doing to convince the chairman of British Coal to back off and instead of selling that land for housing development let us have some industrial units? Nottinghamshire county council is interested in doing just that. The Minister should pull his socks up and do something about it.

Mr. Lee: I wish that the hon. Gentleman, in his own inimitable style, would shout from the rooftops that in the two years to March 1989 unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 24·4 per cent.

5. **Mr. Aspinwall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of employment in the south-west of England.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in the south-west region was 1,965,000. That represents an increase of 213,000 or 12 per cent. since December 1983.

Mr. Aspinwall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fall in unemployment of 213,000 reflects the strength of the small business sector in the community in the south-west? Is he aware that the Wansdyke enterprise agency in my constituency has made a considerable contribution to promoting small businesses? How does the Minister intend to support that and other enterprise agencies in the south-west?

Mr. Lee: On the first point, my hon. Friend is right. Self-employment in the south-west increased by 82 per cent. between December 1979 and December 1988. I know how supportive my hon. Friend has been of the Wansdyke enterprise agency and I understand that he is the honorary president of that organisation. The Government consider that the Wansdyke enterprise agency is doing a good job. We have put in substantial amounts of pump-priming money, but the future for financing the enterprise agency increasingly lies with the private sector and we hope that the enterprise agency will be successful in raising more support from that source.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Of the 213,000 people who found jobs in the south-west of England, where there are a lot of Labour voters, how many were in part-time jobs and for how many was the pay so low that they had to inquire about family credit?

Mr. Lee: It is impossible to answer that question.

Mr. Harris: I very much welcome the figures given by my hon. Friend, but does he agree that training plays an important part and that the need for training is great in the south-west, especially in Cornwall? In that context, although completely rejecting suggestions that the Government are somehow to blame for the rejection of Cornwall county council's applications for the European social fund, will my hon. Friend nevertheless redouble his Department's efforts to ensure that those applications are reconsidered by the Commission in Brussels?

Mr. Lee: We are, of course, supportive of training and we hope that there will be a satisfactory and keen response from the private sector in the south-west—and especially in Cornwall—to the opportunity for the development of training and enterprise councils. I note what my hon. Friend says about European funding, but I have nothing to add to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State gave to my hon. Friend last Friday.

6. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of employment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fowler: Between March 1983 and December 1988, the work force in employment in the United Kingdom increased be almost 3 million to more than 26·5 million —the highest level on record in this country.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in west Norfolk unemployment has fallen by 18 per cent. —to 5·9 per cent.—as a result of the growth in enterprise and small businesses and that that will be enormously assisted by the recent announcement by our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport that the railway line to King's Lynn is to be electrified? Can my right hon. Friend tell the House whether the encouraging growth in self-employment locally has been reflected in the rest of the country?

Mr. Fowler: There has been a substantial increase in self-employment, which has undoubtedly been one of the most important elements in the growth of employment. Between 1983 and 1988, there was an increase of about 840,000 in the number of self-employed.

Ms. Short: Does the Secretary of State know that all over the developed world there has been an increase in the participation rate, with more and more women coming into the labour force? Our record is worse than that of any other country in terms of the growth of low-paid employment. Almost the majority of our work force is now low paid. Does the Secretary of State not understand that our high participation rate is a measure of underdevelopment? There are now more young people in higher education in South Korea than in Britain. The figures are nothing to boast about—they are a measure of our decline.

Mr. Fowler: I do not accept what the hon. Lady says. International comparisons in the growth of employment show that the increase in numbers in employment between 1983 and 1987 in the United Kingdom equals that of the rest of the European Community combined. That is the measure of our success.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the proportion of the population of working age in employment in the United Kingdom is now 66 per cent.? How does that compare with other countries in the European Community?

Mr. Fowler: It is higher than in the European Community. The point that the hon. Lady made about women in employment was equally dud. The participation rate among women in this country is much higher than in almost every other European country.

Mr. Janner: Is the Secretary of State aware that the unemployment rate in parts of my constituency remains more than a third, especially on major estates such as Braunstone, Beaumont Leys, Mowmaker, Stocking Farm and New Parks? Is he aware that on 4 May my

constituents there will show what they think of the Government at the county council election, when they will have the chance to express their views through their votes?

Mr. Fowler: Like the hon. and learned Gentleman, I look forward to that election. He omitted to mention that unemployment in his area has fallen by 34 per cent. in the past two years.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are bright prospects for increasing employment in our traditional port areas arising from the abolition of the national dock labour scheme and that a dock strike would damage those prospects?

Mr. Fowler: I agree with both those points and I congratulate my hon. Friend on getting in the points that he was prevented by the Opposition Front Bench from making last night.

Environmental Assessments

7. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training and information has been given to the agricultural inspectorate on environmental assessment associated with the Food and Environment Protection Act.

9. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training and information has been given to the agricultural inspectorate on environmental assessment associated with the Food and Environment Protection Act.

Mr. Nicholls: Prior to undertaking their enforcement responsibilities under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, the Health and Safety Executive's agricultural inspectors are given a week's specific training on the requirements and implications of the Act. This is supplemented as required by further local and national training.

Mr. Vaz: What publications have been made available to the agricultural inspectorate to assist it with this important work?

Mr. Nicholls: The full resources of the service are available to inspectors to enable them to equip themselves for the task. It is important to note that if they require specialised or specialist help in their investigations there are a number of agencies they can contact to provide that specific help.

Mr. Hood: Is the Minister aware of the great public concern about the harmful effects of pesticide residues coming into our food chain? Knowing that, what are the Government doing to provide more resources to help the agriculture inspectors to carry out their extra responsibilities?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to voice that public concern. It was to address that concern that the Food and Environment Protection Act and the structures under it were introduced. The resources now applied generally to the Health and Safety Executive compare in real terms as favourably, if not more so, with those given by the Labour Government.

Mr. Paice: Is it not the case that without the development of a range of "responsible" pesticides in the past few years this country might have gone hungry? Instead of condemning all pesticides, should we not concentrate on adequate testing to find out which ones may be damaging, if at all, either to people or to the environment and concentrate on weeding them out instead of building up an anti-pesticide hype across the whole spectrum?

Mr. Nicholls: I am sure that my hon. Friend is entirely right. It is too easy to forget that the whole idea of a pesticide is to kill pests and that to that extent it must obviously be a dangerous and deleterious chemical. The effect of the advisory committee on pesticides is to ensure that only safe products are launched on the market and, perhaps more importantly, to ensure that the position can be reviewed as and when necessary in the light of increased knowledge.

Service Industries

8. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been employed in service industries in the north-west region in each of the last three years, expressed as a proportion of the labour force; and if he will give comparable figures for the south-east.

Mr. Lee: In each of the past three years, about two thirds of all employees in employment in the north-west were in service industries, compared with three quarters of all employees in employment in the south-east.

Mr. Evans: Does the Minister acknowledge that well-paid service jobs have mushroomed in the south-east to offset the decline in manufacturing, but that although manufacturing jobs have also collapsed in the north-west there has been no such growth in well-paid service jobs in that area? What plans does the Minister have to create a fairer distribution of those well-paid service jobs to areas such as the north-west?

Mr. Lee: The hon. Gentleman is not being his usual fair and generous self. There has been a rise in employment in service industries in the north-west of about 7 per cent. The hon. Gentleman must not confuse the prosperity of manufacturing industry with the numbers of people actually employed in manufacturing. I take the example of Pilkington, a company that he knows well in his constituency and which he frequently and rightly praises. Employment in that key manufacturing company has fallen from 18,000 in 1980 to about 6,000 now.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend accept that as part of the tremendous success of the Government's economic and employment policies, the position in the south-east has changed dramatically? Does he also accept that many people in the south-east would not mind at all if some Government jobs were moved further north? Will he assure us that he and his colleagues in the Government will look again at the south-east, which has for too long been regarded as the place with the highest standard of living in the United Kingdom but which is under enormous pressures for a variety of reasons and requires a new look to be taken at it?

Mr. Lee: My hon. Friend is right. Curiously enough, yesterday, when I was in Oldham opening the fifth "Industrious Oldham Exhibition", I came across a

manufacturer who some years ago had moved his manufacturing plant from Kent to Oldham. He had no regrets at all about the move. He is prospering in the constituency of the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond).

Mr. James Lamond: The Minister was welcomed in Oldham, where he saw the Labour council's efforts to attract manufacturing jobs to the area. However, will he reconsider his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans)? It was difficult to follow the Minister, but perhaps he meant that the unfortunate result of investment in manufacturing industry—such as in Pilkingtons and in textiles—has frequently been that, despite the prosperity, the numbers of employed in those industries have fallen. If that is what the Minister is saying, does that not reinforce my hon. Friend's point that well-paid service jobs are needed in the north-west even more than they are in the south?

Mr. Lee: I am glad to see that Opposition Members advocate the creation and support of well-paid service industry jobs, because that was precisely the point that I was endeavouring to get across. Perhaps, I did not completely succeed. I repeat that we must separate the prosperity of manufacturing industry from the numbers directly employed in it, which was why I gave Pilkingtons as an example. A service industry in the north-west that I know very well is the tourism and hospitality industry, jobs in that sector have increased considerably. Nearly 150,000 people are employed in tourism and hospitality in the north-west.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is most unfortunate that Opposition Members constantly talk down the north-west? Parts of the north-west, such as Cheshire, are booming because of the vast increase in service jobs. Certainly in my constituency, banks, insurance companies and a vast number of other firms are bringing many service jobs into the area. It does us no good to have the north-west constantly unfavourably compared with the south-east. In fact, parts of the north-west, because of prosperity, are exhibiting the same kind of strains as the south-east.

Mr. Lee: My hon. Friend is right, but he should not, with respect, expect too much from the Opposition too quickly. We have at least now an acknowledgement that well-paid service jobs are important.

Training

10. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide comparable figures on training in 1979 and estimated for 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: In 1979-80 some 91,000 adults entered Government training programmes and 216,000 school-leavers entered YOP, of whom 31,000 were given off-the-job training. In 1987-88 about 887,000 adults and young people started on Government training programmes.

Mr. Favell: Will my right hon. Friend spell out the significance of those figures to the Opposition, who, like a pushmi-pullyu, one moment condemn every measure brought forward by the Government for training and the next bemoan the lack of Government interest in training? Will my right hon. Friend say something about his plans for the training of the self-employed?

Mr. Fowler: The business growth training programme is certainly being introduced for helping with the training of self-employed people. I believe that that will be an important innovation for them. On the question of training figures, perhaps the most important aspect is that more young people are now undergoing training than ever before in our history.

Mr. Eastham: Is the Minister not projecting a jaundiced picture when he talks about the number of people being trained under this Government? Is it not a fact that very often training is a convenient cover-up for the massive unemployment figures? Is it not also a fact that the apprentice training schemes, which we used to have in 1979, are now practically non-existent?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. According to the labour force survey, something like 328,000 people are covered by apprenticeships. What is of even more importance is the quality of the scheme for young people and the latest figures show that 85 per cent. of those who have completed YTS go into jobs or into further education. I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: In spite of the impressive training figures, does my right hon. Friend agree that we still have serious skill shortages? With falling unemployment, does he agree that the best way to resolve that problem is to encourage people to stay at work longer and to cut out the tax breaks previously given to those who take early retirement?

Mr. Fowler: One future development will be that more people will stay on at work for longer, if that is their wish. The policies of companies should be engineered to enable that to happen and to put more value on the experience of older workers.

Mr. Fatchett: How does the Secretary of State reconcile his response, which was a typical exercise in self-congratulation, with the CBI's recent statement that there is an unprecedented shortage of skills in our economy and that, since the CBI has collected those figures, the situation has never been more grave? Is it not the case that the Government have always seen training as a means of massaging the unemployment figures rather than as a means of dealing with skill shortages and giving our people the skills that they deserve so that they can do proper jobs?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The CBI backs in full—I regret that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) does not—the training and enterprise councils, which are designed to create more and better training.

I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman heard what I said about training for employment, because of those people on YTS, 85 per cent. are now going into jobs or into further education. I believe that employment training will have a similar success.

Labour Force Survey

11. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received following the publication of the labour force survey; and if he will make a statement on its conclusions.

Mr. Fowler: The 1988 labour force survey was published in March and since then I have received a number of communications on it.

The survey results confirm that there has been a continued and strong growth in employment. Between spring 1987 and spring 1988 employment increased by 682,000, of which 60 per cent. was among full-time employees; self-employment grew by 160,000, continuing the upward trend of recent years and unemployment fell by more than ½ million and remained at a lower level than the monthly unemployment count.

The survey confirmed the picture of rapidly falling unemployment recorded by the monthly unemployment count. – *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There seems to be an undercurrent of discussion. Hon. Members should kindly listen.

Mr. Stevens: I thank my right hon. Friend for that substantial reply. In the *Employment Gazette* did my right hon. Friend notice the figures that showed that 4·8 million people of working age received training and education courses in 1986 compared to 2·1 million in 1984? Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures, taken with the labour force survey, the International Labour Organisation and OECD estimates of unemployment, show that the claims about unemployment and training levels made by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen to be just mischievous nonsense?

Mr. Fowler: Yes. My hon. Friend is right. What the labour force survey reveals above all is that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has been fiddling the unemployment figures upwards for months.

Mr. Leighton: How many people are now doing more than one job? I understand that more than 1 million people have either two or three jobs and that they are counted in the figures two or three times.

Mr. Fowler: I do not have the full figures on that, but I shall seek to get them for the hon. Gentleman. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the labour force survey shows that 60 per cent. of the growth in employment is accounted for by full-time work and that in the past 12 months 75 per cent. of new jobs created have been full-time.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the information coming from the labour force survey shows very clearly how much Scotland has benefited from the policies of this Government and indeed, that there are more people in work today? In particular, the growth in high technology, the new satellite industry, leisure, recreation and tourism shows that the Scottish economy is in good shape.

Mr. Fowler: Yes, indeed. There has also been a very substantial amount of inward investment into Scotland, and into other parts of this country, which has helped create new jobs. It has been attracted into this country by the strength of the economy and the policies of this Government.

Competent Persons

12. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will meet the chair of the Health and Safety Commission to discuss the role of competent persons.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. Many provisions in health and safety legislation require specified tasks to be carried out by competent persons. The Health and Safety Commission keeps these provisions under review. If the commission wishes to make proposals to my right hon. Friend which would affect the role of competent persons in any particular area, he will of course consider these proposals most carefully.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the Minister tell us who makes the judgment that someone has achieved the level of competence to be recognised as a competent person?

Mr. Nicholls: The reason why the concept of a competent person has been enshrined in our legislation for many years is that it puts the onus on the employer in those circumstances to ensure that the person is competent. I think that the hon. Lady will agree with me on reflection that to actually have a requirement of competency is often better than having a test of qualification. Whether somebody is competent is a matter of fact.

Mr. Hayward: Will my hon. Friend explain how he can meet and discuss anything with a chair, please?

Mr. Nicholls: I am tempted to follow my hon. Friend in thinking about that. Perhaps I misread the question; I thought it probably said "chairman".

Health and Safety Executive

13. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive's budget provision for the next three years.

Mr. Cope: Gross provision for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive in the three years from 1 April last is £118·3 million, £125·9 million and £133·5 million, as shown in the public expenditure White Paper. The provision allows for real growth in the executive's activities in all three years, including an increase in the number of inspectors, and of inspections.

Mr. Pike: As the Government have also indicated that they will make additional funding available only in exceptional circumstances, will the Minister indicate, if the Government are committed to the Health and Safety Executives, whether a continuing rise in the accident rate would be one of the factors which would influence additional funds being made available?

Mr. Cope: As with all public expenditure, it is kept under review from year to year, but those are the figures for which the hon. Gentleman asked for this year and the next two years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether he expects the Heath and Safety Executive

to submit evidence to Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry into the Hillsborough disaster? Does the executive's statutory responsibility to inform the public about safety matters or its liaison function with local authorities have any bearing on safety measures at football grounds?

Mr. Cope: It is not part of the Heath and Safety Executive's direct responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act or other legislation of that sort, but it is advising on safety measures and will continue to give such advice as is required both to the authorities in charge of the football grounds and to the inquiry.

Mr. Meacher: How can the Minister give such complacent answers about funding when his Department is continually extending the responsibilities of the Health and Safety Executive without providing any extra resources to implement them? How can he justify introducing the new and important Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations this year without providing extra resources to enforce them? Is it not pure gesture politics to will the end but to refuse to will the means?

Mr. Cope: I have just said that we are increasing the resources and enabling the Heath and Safety Executive to increase its staff. The COSHH regulations are about much more than transport.

YTS

15. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the numbers of YTS trainees who obtain employment within six months of completing their training.

Mr. Cope: A total of 82 per cent. of young people completing their YTS course obtain employment soon after.

Mr. Franks: That figure will be welcomed by all hon. Members, or at least by all Members who sit on the Conservative Benches. Is it not the case that the youth training scheme was, and still is, opposed by the Labour party? Is not the Government's record in stark contrast with the hollow words and crocodile tears of the Labour party?

Mr. Cope: The Labour party does not seem to be of one mind about YTS. Sometimes it supports it and sometimes the Labour party gets in its way. I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about the figures. In Barrow in Furness, 90·4 per cent. of young people who complete YTS obtain employment and that is even better than the national average.

Mr. Ashley: How many of these trainees are disabled? What has been their comparative success rate in taking up jobs' after six months training?

Mr. Cope: I cannot answer that without notice, but I will write to the right hon. Gentleman and give him the figures.

17. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of young people currently undertaking training on YTS.

Mr. Cope: At the end of February 1989, 401,500 young people were recorded as in training on YTS.

Mr. Wood: Is my hon. Friend aware that YTS has made a major contribution in Stevenage to many young people's successful transition from school to work? Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the work in terms of the two year scheme is going well?

Mr. Cope: Yes. It has made a major contribution and it is improving the training record all the time.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I have been asked to reply.

This morning my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister addressed the conference on security and co-operation in Europe forum at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. This afternoon my right hon. Friend will attend the 150th anniversary of independence celebrations in Luxembourg.

Mr. Cohen: Was a computer error which indicated plenty of space on the terraces one of the contributory factors to the Hillsborough disaster? Would not computer failure at turnstiles checking ID cards repeat the conditions which led to those deaths? Is that not a powerful reason for the Government to withdraw their Football Spectators Bill, await the inquiry report and have a radical re-think with the emphasis on safety?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said yesterday that it would be seemly to delay progress on the Football Spectators Bill for a short while in view of Saturday's tragedy at Hillsborough stadium. I do not wish to add to that statement and I think that we should allow a little time to elapse. However, the Government believe that the future of football in this country lies in a national membership scheme in designated grounds and now, it seems, in providing all-seated accommodation at major football grounds.

Mr. Amery: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is reported to have said that a European monetary union would lead to a European federation and a European Government. Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House remind my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that the countries of the British Commonwealth and empire operated a single currency for more than 30 years under the guidance of a single reserve bank—the Bank of England—without ever coming near to a federation? Will he remind him of the guidance given in an old hymn:

"I do not care to see the distant scene
one step enough for me"?

Would he also remind him of the opportunities which we lost with regard to the coal and steel authority and the Messina conference through too pedantic an attachment to phraseology?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be grateful to my right hon. Friend for his words and his wisdom in these matters. However, I assure him that any recent announcement with regard to the Government about a united states of Europe is simply not on the agenda.

Mr. Hattersley: Having had 24 hours in which to appreciate the mood of the House and the country, are the Government now willing at least formally to suspend consideration of part 1 of the Football Spectators Bill until the Taylor inquiry has reported on the whole subject of safety at football grounds without the inhibition or pressure of concurrent parliamentary legislation?

Mr. Wakeham: The Third reading of the Football Spectators Bill in the House of Lords was fixed for 24 April. That has been postponed, and no new date has yet been arranged. The Bill is an enabling framework. The Government have already given a full commitment not to implement the membership scheme within that framework until satisfactory arrangements have been worked out. That commitment still stands and, obviously, now embraces the lessons to be learnt from this tragic event.

Mr. Hattersley: That answer is, I think, word for word, what the Home Secretary said yesterday and is equally lacking in meaning. May I put a wider point to the Leader of the House. Will the Government understand the advantages to the whole country of proceeding on this subject by co-operation rather than confrontation? Will the Leader of the House make it clear to the Prime Minister that, given goodwill on both sides, such co-operation is possible? It is absurd that this should become a party political matter. We do not want that to happen, and I do not think that the country wants it to happen.

Mr. Wakeham: Neither do the Government want it to happen, but if there is to be goodwill on both sides the hon. Gentleman had better listen to the replies that are given. I was not repeating what the Home Secretary said yesterday.

Q2. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend give a firm and clear commitment to retain the pound sterling, and not to trade it for some kind of European funny money?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear yesterday the fundamental and far-reaching nature of the proposals in the Delors report. I can assure my hon. Friend that the proposals for a united states of Europe are simply not on the agenda. There can be no question of future treaty amendments along the lines of the Delors report. We cannot accept the transfer of sovereignty that that implies. What we should be doing is pressing ahead with completion of the single market by 1992—a major task, to which the United Kingdom is totally committed.

Mr. McAllion: I know that the Leader of the House will wish to join me in sending the sympathy of the entire House to the family and friends of the young Dundee girl who was killed by two Rottweiler dogs last Friday. The House cannot turn away from its clear responsibility to control and restrict the availability of licences for these and other powerful and potentially lethal dogs. Will the Leader of the House therefore consult his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary with a view to the initiation of an immediate review of the no-licence situation and the early introduction of legislation to ensure that these killer dogs are removed from, and safety restored to the streets of this country?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly consult the Home Secretary. I have read about the recent tragic incident in Scotland. There has long been legislation to control dangerous dogs, and remedies are available once it is clear that a particular dog is dangerous. The breeding of dogs for sale commercially is already controlled by legislation. We do not think it sensible to try to extend these controls to private individuals who wish to sell the offspring of pets. We are therefore not contemplating legislation to control a particular breed or type of dog. However, I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend.

Q3. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April 1989.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Burns: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Chelmsford borough council on its "operation eyesore" this week for cleaning up litter blackspots in the area? If my Control of Litter (Fines) Bill is unsuccessful, owing to the absence of parliamentary time, will the Government be prepared to bring in legislation to give all local authorities the power to impose on-the-spot litter fines? Could shops, fast-food outlets and banks be compelled to keep the pavements outside their premises litter-free?

Mr. Wakeham: I certainly congratulate the Chelmsford borough council on the steps that it is taking to combat litter. I hope to be in Chelmsford on Friday to have a look at it. Litter is everybody's problem, and we are all involved in finding solutions. Local authorities, in particular, have a valuable job to do. The Government are considering a variety of measures to back up litter abatement activities, including those provided for in my hon. Friend's Bill.

Mr. Ashdown: Can the right hon. Gentleman deny that 7·5 million people in Britain now drink water with excessive levels of lead, and 5 million people drink water with nitrate levels which exceed the European standards? Can he deny that Britain is liable to be brought before the European Court for those infringements? What action do the Government intend to take to ensure that we are not prosecuted for failing to provide safe water for the people of Britain?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot confirm or deny the hon. Gentleman's figures, but I am glad to hear that he is supporting the steps that the Government are taking to improve the quality of water through the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Rowe: Will my right hon. Friend pass on to his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister an invitation for her to visit Mid-Kent and other parts of Kent so that, with her considerable interest in the problems of the environment, she can see for herself the immense pressures to which that county is now subjected as a direct consequence of the success of her own policies?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will enjoy a visit to Kent when she can make it, and I shall pass on the invitation.

Amazonia

Q4. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to her reply of 21 March, *Official Report*, column 511, if she will make a statement on the further proposals to help Brazil in research into forestry regeneration and allied subjects; and what resources are being earmarked for the conservation of the Amazonian rain forest.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

We have written to the Brazilian Government offering to finance further expert advice and research on the conservation and management of the Amazonian rain forests and on climate change. We have also offered more training in the United Kingdom in environmental disciplines. We have suggested sending soon to Brazil a team from the Overseas Development Administration to discuss those possibilities and any other proposals which the Brazilians may make.

Mr. Dalyell: At the top of their list of resource requirements, the Brazilians put the need for four large cargo and two personnel carrying helicopters. Can we help?

Mr. Wakeham: Assistance to the Environmental Protection Agency is one of the possibilities which I hope that the ODA team will be able to discuss when it visits Brazil, probably in May.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will my right hon. Friend ask the Prime Minister to make it clear to the Government of Brazil that there is no intention to internationalise the Amazon basin and that we respect their sovereignty, but, nevertheless, we expect the Brazilian Government to give a lead in conservation in that area and to make clear to the rest of the world the assistance that they require?

Mr. Wakeham: The Brazilian Government are well aware of their responsibilities. We are working closely with them and that is the best way to proceed.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that the Government will in no way support the funding of projects in the Amazon rain forest which lead to the destruction of that forest by either the EEC, the World bank or the international monetary fund? Will he also accept that the serious problem of the destruction of rain forests in Amazonia and elsewhere is partly caused by the debt crisis, which imposes an economic system on those countries which forces them to destroy the rain forest and thus damage the environment for the rest of the world?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government are trying to assist in solving the problem and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should suggest otherwise.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Favell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, ahead of the Taylor inquiry, it is wrong to condemn the police for the Hillsborough disaster last Saturday? When I started going to Hillsborough football ground 40 years ago with my parents and my young brother and young sister, the crowd capacity was far greater than now, there were few policemen, fans were not segregated and people felt safe inside and outside the ground. In other words, if people only treated each other now as they did then, one policeman would not have been faced with the dreadful life and death decision that had to be made last Saturday and we may well have avoided the appalling loss of life.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Why people died is a matter for the judicial inquiry to determine and it would be premature for me to comment now.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Leader of the House advise home workers in my constituency, who have just had their wages halved by F. K. I. Babcock, how they can survive when they have to pay soaring interest rates and manage with inflation running at nearly 8 per cent.?

Mr. Wakeham: That is not a matter for me to answer at the Dispatch Box. If the hon. Lady wishes to write to me about it, I shall look into it.

Africa (Visit)

Q6. **Sir Hugh Rossi:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding her recent visit to Africa.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

Since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's return from Africa, she has received numerous congratulations on the success of the visit.

Sir Hugh Rossi: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister is to be congratulated on the part that she was able to play in Namibia, and that the decision, endorsed by Cuba and Angola as well as South Africa, for the withdrawal of SWAPO forces fully vindicated her condemnation of their cynical contravention of the United Nations plan and the Geneva protocol, and their attempt to dominate elections down the barrel of a rifle?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend is right. SWAPO's initial action caused tragic and unnecessary loss of life. But the UN plan has survived a severe test. What matters now is that the proposed cease-fire should be made to work and that preparations should resume for free and fair elections. We are doing everything possible to help. The House will welcome the role that our signallers are playing in manning the assembly points in northern Namibia.

Toyota Plant (Derbyshire)

3.30 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on a major new investment by the Toyota Motor Corporation.

The House will be aware that Toyota has been considering setting up a car plant in Europe and that the United Kingdom was the lead candidate as a location for the project.

I am pleased to be able to report that the company has now made a final decision to proceed with the project in the United Kingdom. The president of the company, Dr. Shoichiro Toyoda, and my right hon. and noble Friend are today signing a document setting out the heads of agreement reached between the company and the Government, copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Toyota has chosen a 280-acre site at Burnaston near Derby. The project will be in two phases. In phase 1, after a short period of pilot production starting in December 1992, commercial production will begin in August 1993 and will rise gradually thereafter to the maximum capacity of 100,000 cars per year. When economic and commercial circumstances allow, the project will move into phase 2, in which capacity will be expanded to 200,000 cars per year. The plant will then employ some 3,000 people, and will involve a total investment of about £700 million.

The company has decided to proceed with the project without Government financial assistance, and it is its firm intention to achieve a local content level of 60 per cent. from the start of commercial production in August 1993 and an 80 per cent. level within a further two years.

Toyota's project was probably the largest mobile industrial investment still to be won and it represents a major vote of confidence in the United Kingdom. I have no doubt that it will make a significant contribution to the local economy in the area around Derby, to the United Kingdom economy and indeed to the European economy as a whole.

I am sure the whole House will join me in wishing Toyota every success with it.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Will the Chancellor accept that we welcome his statement and an investment which will mean valuable jobs and new economic capacity in the east midlands? Does he recognise that warm congratulations are due to all those, and especially to my colleagues in Derbyshire county council—*[Laughter.]*—who have worked hard to secure this investment? For all those who laugh in such an ignorant fashion, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that Derbyshire county council has agreed to put in £12 million of its own money but has been refused any increased capital allocation for this year? Is this not an example of a Labour county council being prepared to make an effort which the Government have refused to make?

Does he recognise that, welcome though this news is, we should not be blinded to its real significance? If it were really evidence of economic strength, should we not expect comparable investments to be made by British companies with British resources? Is it not now easier for industry, especially in the regions, to obtain investment from the far east rather than from the south-east? Are we not now seeing the final stages of a process which has replaced an indigenous car industry with one which is owned and controlled from Detroit, Paris and now Tokyo?

What safeguards have been obtained about the meaning of local content? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, for this purpose, "local content" means EEC content? Is there any guarantee that the Powertrain will be manufactured here and that design and research will be carried out in Britain? How soon does he expect our balance of trade in cars, at present in deficit to the tune of £4·7 billion, to return to balance?

Mr. Newton: I welcome the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and I am glad to note that he endorses the welcome that I and, I think, the whole House have given. A great deal of work has been done by all the local authorities involved, of varying political complexions and by the Department of Trade and Industry office in the east midlands, to secure this investment.

The hon. Gentleman's reference to Derbyshire's proposed investment must, I think, be related to reports that it has offered to invest £20 million from its pension fund in this firm. Whether that is accepted by the company is a matter for the company, but it is certainly not part of the project as it has been announced today, nor an essential ingredient of it.

If I heard the hon. Gentleman rightly, and his comment about the Government having refused help, I would make it absolutely clear that the company was well aware of the possibility of regional selective assistance, for example, in those parts of the country to which that applies, and specifically chose this location in Derbyshire, which is not an assisted area. To suggest that that is in any sense a refusal of Government assistance is an absolutely ridiculous and misleading proposition.

My answer to the hon. Gentleman's rather tendentious remarks about the replacement of an indigenous car industry is that import penetration of the British motor car market last year was almost exactly the same as in 1979. Between 1974 and 1979, it doubled. That was when the damage was done to the indigenous car industry, and we are now seeing some strengthening of it.

The hon. Gentleman asked about issues of local content. I confirm that local content means European Community content, as I am sure he understands. Toyota has made it clear that it intends to build up quite rapidly to the 80 per cent. figure which I mentioned. We hope that it will also decide to do research and development in this country, as Nissan has recently decided to do.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that we in south Derbyshire are absolutely delighted and pledge to build at Burnaston a showplace factory of Europe? Will he agree that Toyota chose Great Britain in Europe because of the atmosphere of encouragement for investment and top quality business created by the Government, and that it chose Derbyshire in Britain because of the first-class site, the excellent work force and the full co-operation, which became apparent in recent months, between all concerned? It is inappropriate and cynical for any individual to try to claim the credit. All concerned deserve it, and we hope that that co-operation will continue.

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. It is a striking fact about the confidence of overseas investors in Britain as a good place to do business that within the past week three major international companies with world names have made decisions which amount to investment in this country of over £1 billion.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I welcome the announcement and join the Chancellor of the Duchy in wishing Toyota and the people of Derbyshire well in this project. What time scale did the right hon. Gentleman have in mind when he said that "economic and commercial circumstances allowing", the project will move on to phase two? Will he also dispel fears that Britain in many respects is becoming an Airfix model kit assembly line? What design and engineering content will there be for British designers and engineers? Will they be involved in further development work by the Toyota group?

Mr. Newton: I must resist, on the basis of our experience with other major motormanufacturers here, including, most notably in recent years, Nissan, the suggestion that what is involved here is in any sense just a screwdriver assembly plant. I have made it clear that, when commercial production begins, local content will start at 60 per cent. and rise within two years to 80 per cent., which is rather faster than the build-up that has taken place at Nissan, which is now around 70 per cent. The precise make-up of that will be for the company to decide, but its initial investment includes a press shop, a body shop, a paint shop, a final assembly shop and a plastic moulding shop. I am encouraged by the experience of Nissan to suggest that it will not be long before Toyota is undertaking investment in design and development here in the same way as Nissan has found worth while.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are two aspects of particular significance about this announcement? First, as the glum faces of Opposition Members testify, it is a tribute to our economic policy and the economic recovery of this country which is the place to make cars in Europe. Secondly, in the circumstances of the deficit—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sir Hal Miller.

Sir Hal Miller: In the circumstances of the deficit on the visible balance of trade, we should be grateful, in a situation where Ford and Vauxhall accounted for the total increase in imports into this country last year, to the Japanese for increasing the vehicle build in this country and remedying that situation.

Mr. Newton: Yes, indeed; I very much agree with the spirit of what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is it not a fact that the attraction to the company was that Derbyshire county council offered £12·5 million in infrastructure and support, against which no extra capital allocations of any kind are made available by the Department of the Environment, and that it has recommended the £20 million investment from the pension fund in accounting that has been attacked systematically by the Government as a very poor example of attitudes towards confidence? Having paid that tribute to the county council and its leadership, is it not also a tragedy that people in this country, particularly unemployed people from the motor industry, should have to look to foreign investment instead of seeing the money put in to build up our domestic product?

Mr. Newton: I have already made the point in response to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) that, on any reading of the statistics, the principal difficulties of the United Kingdom motor industry in respect of imports occurred during the period of the last Labour Administration. What is equally clear is that the decisions about overseas investment in this country, not just by Japanese companies but in the recent decision by Ford to spend about £700 million on an engine plant in south Wales and just yesterday the decision by Bosch to invest £190 million in south Wales, reflect a significant strengthening of the United Kingdom motor car production and components industries, directed towards the difficulties of a longer period of decline, especially during the 1970s.

On the first half of the question of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I commented on Derbyshire county council earlier. Of necessity, various local authorities will need to work with the company in relation to infrastructure and access, and in other ways. The details of that remain to be sorted out.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Is this not good news for Derby, not least because the Toyota Motor Company has an excellent record of not closing any factory that it opens? Is it not also true that Derbyshire is now a far more attractive county for inward investment, following the Government's excellent decision to introduce a uniform business rate? That means that the days of high business rates, due to the high spending of irresponsible Left-wing county councils such as Derbyshire, are numbered.

Mr. Newton: Certainly, I understand that Derbyshire is the second highest rated shire county in the country. One of the facts that Toyota may have had in mind is the Government's policy to ensure that businesses will not be penalised in the way that they were in Derbyshire and elsewhere.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Does not this decision vindicate the way in which elected members and officers of the county council, city council and district council have worked together for the benefit of the people of Derbyshire? Is it not a pity that, with the exception of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), that all-party pursuit of the interests of the people of Derbyshire has not been reflected by Conservative Members?

Mr. Newton: From what I heard, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South also recognised that there had been a co-operative exercise between all the local authorities involved—quite apart from their political complexion—and central Government, particularly as represented by my Department's office in the east midlands. Everyone involved should be well satisfied with the outcome of that effort.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Is it not the case that, if Toyota has been more successful than British car manufacturers, it is because it produces products that people want to buy? In the 1960s and 1970s, the British car industry was hamstrung by poor labour relations and management, and the unthought-out and irrational

[Mr. Phillip Oppenheim]

reorganisation policies of successive Labour Governments? Is it not also true that the real reason that Toyota has come to Derbyshire is the excellence and skills of the local work force combined with the new economic climate that makes manufacturing attractive in Britain? It is totally ludicrous for one county council, or county council leader, to muscle in and try to claim all the glory for what was a co-operative effort by the Government and a range of local authorities.

Mr. Newton: I agree with my hon. Friend that the fundamental reason for the decision of Toyota, and other overseas companies, to come here, is the dramatic improvement in the climate for doing business—including that of industrial relations—in this country. Without such a climate we certainly would not have received the flow of major new projects into this country.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Does the Minister recognise the professionalism and businesslike nature of the prospectus put forward by Derbyshire county council? The fact that it also runs a highly successful and professional pension fund means that money is available for investment, which will produce returns for the pension fund and make it viable. Will local suppliers have access to provisions in the area, or will the free market knock out some of the potential which exists in Derbyshire? Will the markets in the EEC be open to Toyota or will we be confronted by the problems that recently arose with Nissan in France? Will the east midlands line be electrified in order to transport the goods produced, through the Channel tunnel into the European market?

Mr. Newton: The subject of the hon. Gentleman's last question will be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, and I have no doubt that he will note it. On the question of local content and access to the European Community market, the understanding signed between my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the company today specifically indicates the commitment of both Toyota and the Department to ensure that the project contributes to the development of long-term collaboration between Toyota and the local components and other supplying industries.

As for access to European markets, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. and noble Friend made a statement yesterday about the outcome of our representations to the Commission on the import of Nissan cars into France. The Commissioner has just replied saying that he has now received a formal assurance from the French Government that Nissan cars manufactured here will be allowed to enter France independent of the level of car imports into France from Japan. Given that the local content arrangements are expected to be the same as Toyota, I see no reason why the outcome should be different.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the news that he has announced this afternoon is a tremendous coup for Britain? Is it a great success for Britain to have landed the two biggest motor car firms for investment within the EEC, and it will give our component manufacturers and many thousands of small firms a wonderful opportunity to bid for the business. That will provide employment and added wealth for this country. We should be welcoming it, not carping like Opposition Members.

Mr. Newton: Yes. It indeed seems likely that the spin-off effect on jobs in the components industry, and other related industries, will be at least as large as the employment directly generated by the Toyota factory. Over a period we may expect 3,000 or more jobs, apart from those in the plant itself, to be created as a result of this investment.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Does the Minister agree that part of Toyota's reason for deciding to come to Britain may have been that it noted that the highly skilled workers in the north-east were building a better version of the same model of car in Washington than is being built in Japan—which is recognised by people in Japan? As a result, Nissan has brought the European technology centre into Britain—and, I hope, into Washington—recognising that that will create 250 jobs for highly skilled designers and engineers in Britain. The Nissan development is creating up to 4,000 jobs for people who desperately need them, and is also giving pride to highly skilled engineers, far too many of whom are on the dole.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I think that he speaks for many people in the north-east in recognising the great value that Nissan has brought to the whole economy of the north-east, and the way in which decsions to invest, for example, in design and development have followed its experience of success in manufacturing here. That is why I am hopeful that the same will happen to Toyota.

I am also glad—and I am sure that I carry the hon. Gentleman with me—that the decision by Fujitsu, which I announced last week, to undertake a major investment, again in the north-east, also reflects the growing acknowledgement in Japan of the success of its companies here in Britain.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): Is it not remarkable that, whenever there is good news for Britain, confirming that the present Government's policies have made the United Kingdom the most attractive country in the Community for inward investment, all that we get from Opposition Members is whingeing, carping and sulking?

Mr. Newton: I do not know that I would have put it quite like that, but I think that the answer is yes.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Has not the Japanese takeover more to do with the fact that the Japanese have an £80 billion balance of payments surplus, as opposed to the £15 billion deficit that we have in this country? Can the Minister give any guarantee that all car trade unions will be allowed to recruit? Will they have the right to strike?

Is the Minister aware that one of the reasons why the Japanese decided to come to south Derbyshire is probably that they misread the newspaper reports? When they read that "Currie had been sacked", they thought that she had gone for ever.

Mr. Newton: It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to learn that the question of how to conduct its industrial relations is, in my view, for the company to decide. As for the first part of his question, we all know that the Japanese

economy is successful because of the success of many of its companies. That is why it is so encouraging that those companies are deciding to come here to do business.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfields): Is my right hon. Friend aware that our warm welcome for Toyota extends not only to the manufacturing sector—including the component industry scattered throughout the west midlands, where new opportunities arise—but to existing car manufacturers? Nothing stimulates success more than good competition.

Is my hon. Friend aware that, compared with the £700 million that Toyota will spend in the next few years, Rover Group will spend £1,000 million on new products and new factory capacity? We say to the people of Derbyshire, "We shall build a better car than you will, and everyone will benefit."

Mr. Newton: I am glad to note what my hon. Friend says and the confidence with which he says it. I shall pass on to hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench his reminder that rising investment in United Kingdom motor car manufacture and components is by no means confined to firms in foreign ownership.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I do not begrudge the investment in Derbyshire, but when the Minister discusses investment with Toyota or any other company, what consideration does he give to cities such as Stoke-on-Trent which, on any sensible criteria, need Government assistance but are refused all Government assistance and therefore need encouragement through investment? How does the right hon. Gentleman propose to help those cities?

Mr. Newton: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will take some encouragement from the fact that Toyota decided to go to Derbyshire without Government assistance, as I said in my statement.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does the Minister agree that the excellence of Toyota systems is reflected in their accent on complete quality, training, speed of product throughput in the factory and total manufacturing concepts, including mass customisation? Those are all things from which British industry could benefit and learn, and that is another bonus for Toyota coming here.

Mr. Newton: Yes—and the effect on components suppliers in the United Kingdom in helping them to increase their competitiveness is an advantage throughout the United Kingdom motor industry and increases our chances of component exports.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): While recognising the satisfaction of hon. Members representing constituencies in Derbyshire and the midlands, the House will recognise that we are tinged with a little disappointment that Wales missed out on the project because of the failure of the Secretary of State's blandishments to the company. Will the Chancellor of the Duchy recognise that, if a company such as Toyota, in making a major investment, can afford to ignore Government incentives, perhaps the Government are pitching conditions on selective financial assistance and other incentives too high to have any meaningful regional policy? Will the right hon. Gentleman examine the conditions that apply to such investments and ensure that a real regional policy is applied to such investments?

Mr. Newton: I simply draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the help given recently to a variety of projects, including Fujitsu last week, Bosch, announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales yesterday, and the Ford engine plant in south Wales to which I referred earlier. I think that we are doing pretty well on regional policy and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman, as a Welsh Member of Parliament, can complain about the share that Wales has.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): May I add a welcome from Nottinghamshire to the welcome from my hon. Friends representing Derbyshire for my right hon. Friend's statement and share their distaste at the sour grapes we have heard from Opposition Members? Will my right hon. Friend, his Department and related Government Departments look at one issue that may help the project become even more successful—the provision of a freight terminal at Toton on the borders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire? The site is tailormade for the project, but I understand there may be some planning problems. If my right hon. Friend can help us overcome those problems, he will have helped Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire to make the project even more successful than I know it will be.

Mr. Newton: I do not think my hon. Friend will expect me to venture into intervening off the cuff in a local planning problem, as he delicately describes it, but I shall certainly ensure that his remarks are drawn to the attention of my appropriate right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I congratulate the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on his command of the pronunciation of the names of Japanese companies, which is obviously a result of so much practice. When does he think that he will come to the Dispatch Box to announce a major investment in Britain by a British company?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to what my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) said a few minutes ago. I answered by saying that a significant amount of investment was being undertaken by companies of various national ownerships.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this decision will be warmly welcomed in Wolverhampton, where there are many important accessory manufacturers? But does my right hon. Friend agree that the choice of site is a lesson to hon. Members of all parties—and even to one of his Cabinet colleagues—who argue that decisions about where manufacturing sites should go are decided wholly by the generosity of the taxpayer through regional grants and subsidies?

Mr. Newton: The point is that it is sensible to have, as we have—especially through regional selective assistance—a policy that enables us to take account of what is required to achieve given outcomes in particular cases. In the other cases to which I have adverted, where regional selective assistance was paid or offered, it was, in our judgment, necessary to secure the project. In this case it has, happily, proved not to be necessary and I welcome that.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The right hon. Gentleman has given the time scale for the development of local content in the production of the car. Has he a similar time scale for the development of jigging tool and design manufacture in this country?

The right hon. Gentleman acknowledges the lead achieved by Japanese manufacturing industry. Does he think that it is because Japan has invested massively in manufacturing industry and spends less than 1 per cent. of gross national product on defence, whereas we spend 5 per cent. and are pouring £11,000 million into Trident? Does he think that there is a serious and important lesson to be learned?

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to prejudge the commercial decisions the company may take on the aspects to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It is asknowledged to be the case throughout the House that one of the difficulties of this country over many years was inadequate investment in this and other industries. Therefore, one of the most encouraging signs of the past few years has been the dramatic rise in investment, especially in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): My right hon. Friend need have no fears that the people of Wales will begrudge a slice of inward investment to their fellow citizens in Derbyshire. Does my right hon. Friend agree that inward investment has come as a result of the Government's policy of low company taxation and good labour relations, and not purely as a result of regional investment programmes? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) might be more generous in his view of the single market in Europe than he has been in the past few years, and that he should welcome this positive encouragement for European investment?

Mr. Newton: Yes, I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): One alternative favoured site was at Duffryn in my constituency, and another was in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes). In our disappointment, we want to congratulate Derby and offer our best wishes to Dr. Shoichiro Toyoda that he and his company will be happy and prosperous in Derby as many other Japanese companies are in Newport and Gwent. The significant point about the announcement today is that the overall level of unemployment for Newport is 9·1 per cent., whereas for Derby it is 7 per cent.

We are not seeing today a failure by Newport. It has great pulling power in attracting new jobs and will be brilliantly successful again in attracting new jobs. We shall miss these jobs because they are the missing piece of the jigsaw in the Newport economy—blue-collar work for male workers. It is a failure for regional policy.

There was another missing piece in the announcement. Have the engine plant and the plant for manufacturing gearboxes yet to be allocated to Derby or is it still possible that they will be allocated to Newport?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I will add further to what I have said about Wales. The company is still considering plans for the engine plant. The Government, and I am sure all others involved, will do everything possible to encourage the company to locate that plant in the United Kingdom. As I have said, our experience with Nissan suggests that we can be reasonably optimistic about that.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): My right hon. Friend's statement today will be widely welcomed in the east midlands, and especially in my mining constituency of Sherwood. In view of the fact that the mining industry is running down its manpower and so that the company is successful in attracting the right type of employment, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the miners have ample facilities for retraining to take the opportunities that the company will make available?

Mr. Newton: I have no doubt that this company, like the others to which I have referred, will want to place heavy emphasis on the importance of training and will contribute to it. Training will be one of the things to which the local authorities will also be directing attention. I very much hope that the company will provide new job opportunities for those whose opportunities are unhappily shrinking in the mining industry.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): May I also assure the Minister that I join in congratulating Derbyshire on a welcome increase in its number of jobs? However, may I point out that we in Scotland have noticed that there has recently been new inward investment in the midlands, in the north-east and even in the south-east of England—and especially in Wales —whereas over the last few months we have noticed a lack of new inward investment in Scotland which, in my view, has been caused by the substantial disarray in Locate in Scotland which, in turn, has partly been caused by rumours that have appeared in many newspapers that the Minister's Department wants to dismantle Locate in Scotland? Will the Minister scotch—if the House will excuse that expression—those rumours and give an absolute assurance that his Department has no intention of cutting or dismantling Locate in Scotland in any way?

Mr. Newton: All of us concerned with these matters —myself, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—are concerned to ensure that regional policy produces a spread of prosperity in all those places where it has not yet reached the level of the south-east. The precise mechanisms for achieving that are a matter in this case for the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My right hon. Friend will recall that, although Shrewsbury is not an assisted area, our town was in the final four for this inward investment. While we clearly envy Derbyshire's success, we in no way begrudge it. I am sure that my right hon. Friend and the House will be interested to know that, despite the fact that that 250-acre site in Shrewsbury will not now be occupied by Toyota, there is still considerable interest in that site, not only from foreign investors, but from a considerable number of British investors. The Toyota deal is neither the first nor the last involving sizeable investment in our area. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a sign of the underlying strength of the economy and that it can be judged by foreign and British investment and not by the niggling sour faces of the Opposition?

Mr. Newton: Yes, indeed, I have noted and will draw to the attention of the people concerned with the Invest in Britain Bureau what my hon. Friend has said generally about his own location.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is it true, as the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) claimed in the Sunday newspapers, that she nagged Ministers into supporting Toyota's bid for the new factory? If that is so, would it not be better if we sent the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South, who has a bit of time on her hands these days, on a nagging tour of British industrialists so that they can start investing in British manufacturing industry?

Will the Minister tell me why, when there is still demand among domestic consumers for cars made in this country, our motor vehicle industry is being taken over more and more by foreign investors and foreign imports? Has it got something to do with the way in which the Government have continually sold out manufacturing industry since 1979?

Mr. Newton: I hesitate to weary the House by repeating the point that I made at the outset about the period in which import penetration into the British motor car market really grew, which was when the Administration that the hon. Gentleman supported were in office.

Having worked closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) in another capacity for some time, I would never have accused her of nagging.

Mr. Tony Banks: She said it herself.

Mr. Newton: What I would simply say is that she is never backward in coming forward in the causes that she espouses.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call the four hon. Members who have been rising regularly, and I ask them to make brief contributions. I call Mr. Wardle.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Is it not the case that the prospects for this excellent project will be greatly enhanced if Toyota can negotiate a single-union agreement? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the interest of Mr. Bill Jordan of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in that regard? In spite of the silence on this from the Opposition this afternoon, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would serve the trade union movement well to bear in mind and to learn from the lessons of the fiasco of Dundee a little while ago?

Mr. Newton: I agree with my hon. Friend's last observations, but, having said clearly to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that the question of how to conduct its industrial relations is for the company, I must say the same to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): Will my right hon. Friend point out to the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who do not appear to understand, that this is not a takeover, but an extremely welcome inward investment? It is the result of successful negotiations conducted by my right hon. Friend and the Secretary of State, who are to be congratulated. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the basic reasons for that success are the strength of the British economy, the industrial revolution that has been achieved and the access to the Continent through the Channel tunnel? Those are all achievements of this Government.

Mr. Newton: It is the clearest single message, not just from the announcement today, but from other recent announcements—not least in the past week—that this country has become the favoured location in Europe for investment by many overseas investors. That is a tribute to what the Government have achieved in the British economy.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): My right hon. Friend has stated that the Toyota company was attracted to make this important investment in this country because of the dramatic improvement in the economic climate. An important feature of that improvement has been the reduction of our corporation taxes to among the lowest rates in the world. Does that not demonstrate the virtue of continuing to drive the rates of corporation taxes down, so that companies are left with more money of their own creation to spend on research and development, on training and on the all-important capital investment?

Mr. Newton: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that the policies that the Government have pursued for industrial relations, both personal and business taxation and, indeed, national insurance, have made an important contribution to bringing about those decisions.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): As one whose constituency was also being considered for this project, I add my congratulations to Derbyshire on securing this investment. Is it not clear from what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that the part played by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) was not insignificant and that the House and her constituents should congratulate her on what she has done to pull all the parties together? Is not another conclusion that we can draw from my right hon. Friend's statement the fact that the case for regional financial assistance is now no longer necessary?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I do not quite go along with the latter, as I indicated in one or two of my earlier comments. My hon. Friend's remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) were characteristically generous. I am sure that she will have been characteristically pleased by his reference to her.

Mr. Speaker: Application under Standing Order No. 20.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I shall take the Standing Order No. 20 application first.

Mr. Harry Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising from the statement.

Mr. Speaker: That may be, but I shall take Standing Order No. 20 first.

British Coal Science Laboratory (Closure)

4.13 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision by British Coal to close the science laboratory at Wath upon Dearne."

The matter is urgent, because British Coal announced the decision to close this laboratory yesterday afternoon. It is serious, because the effect upon my constituency and the neighbouring areas will be severe. We have suffered a series of devastating economic blows in the past five years. Great effort is being made to secure employment and economic revival and the existence of this successful establishment serves as a most useful and valuable pointer to the fact that we can and must successfully accommodate high-tech development.

For British Coal to transfer the work of this laboratory to a locality that is further from the major coal-producing areas and where economic need is much less severe is regrettable. It will be a cause of some bitterness, because the decision will be seen as a brutal disregard of obligation by British Coal.

There is further anxiety, because much has been achieved at Wath regarding the identification of the origins of coal samples. That research, which is extremely effective in identifying cases of cheating in imported coal supplies, has not been properly admired in some of the quarters where it should have been.

Many of the scientists, who are highly qualified, now face either unemployment or the prospect of uprooting, changing their lives and ending the happy local contact which springs from their successful operations in south Yorkshire.

Last Monday, in Energy Question Time, the Under-Secretary of State for Energy, although he was, in part, most reassuring, made it clear that the responsibility for the decision rests entirely with British Coal.

I suggest that this matter is one which the House should consider immediately to allow deep anxiety or anger to be expressed. In that way, a view could be formed about this regrettable and serious decision.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision by British Coal to close the science laboratory at Wath upon Dearne."

I have listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman has said. As he knows, my sole duty when considering an application under Standing Order No. 20 is to decide whether it should be given priority over the business set down for today or for tomorrow. I regret that the matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised does not meet the requirements under the Standing Order and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

Point of Order

4.15 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I apologise to you, Mr. Speaker, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) for interrupting his important Standing Order No. 20 application.

My point of order is simple, Mr. Speaker, and no doubt you will find it easy to deal with it. As you know, the rising sun is now playing an important part in British industry. In order not to offend our good friends in Japan and the Japanese Government could you refer to the House authorities the need for some structural changes to be made so that the rising sun is never again shut out of the Chamber by closing the blinds? I believe that that would be an appropriate step to take.

Mr. Speaker: If I interpret the rumours aright, when we have television—if we have television—the blinds will be permanently drawn. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I must not pre-empt what may be done.

Football Spectators (No 2)

4.16 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a statutory liaison body for the sport of football, to include in its membership the various footballing authorities and their agencies, football league clubs, the Sports Council, football supporters' organisations and other necessary bodies and to make provision for changes in the organisation and function of the sport and for connected purposes.

The enormity of the tragedy which took place last Saturday at Sheffield's Hillsborough stadium—where many football fans either died or were seriously injured—still lies fresh in the hearts and minds of the British people. I take this opportunity to place on record again the thanks of all hon. Members particularly those who are members of the all-party parliamentary football committee, and to all those who helped the injured or the dying in their time of need or who are now helping in whatever way they can to comfort the living.

So that there may be no misunderstanding or speculation about the reason for this Bill, I place on record the fact that the right to introduce it on the Floor of the House was gained some considerable time ago under the rules which govern the acquisition of a ten-minute Bill opportunity in this House.

The Bill has the objective of establishing a statutory liaison body for the sport of football, with a membership which includes the football authorities, their agencies, league clubs, the Sports Council, football supporters' organisations, local authorities, and others. That body has been widely recognised in this House and elsewhere as an alternative to clause 1 of the Government's proposals to introduce legislation to establish a system of compulsory ID registration for football supporters.

A measure of the strength of the Bill's proposals is demonstrated by the fact that it has considerable cross-party support, including support from the Government Benches. The Bill is supported in name by all the officers of the all-party parliamentary football committee. The Bill is also supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), in whose constituency Anfield football ground is located, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) in whose constituency the tragedy occurred on Saturday. It also contains the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), who is regarded by many in this place and outside as the most respected Member of Parliament in terms of sporting authorities.

My colleagues and I are both mystified and saddened by the Government's decision yesterday to continue with the measures contained within section 1 of their Bill. We feel they are out of touch with the lessons of Sheffield, and the advice they have been given by nearly everyone in football. Further, I cannot personally understand the logic in proceeding with such legislation, particularly at this time. I also feel it is time for a rethink and a different approach to the needs of football—a view shared by almost everyone connected with the game.

I echo the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that any decision should be delayed until the findings of the independent inquiry into the Hillsborough tragedy and other related matters are available.

Because of these views, Mr. Speaker, and out of respect for the bereaved families and loved ones of those involved in the recent tragedy, I have decided to withdraw my Bill at this stage in the hope that the Government will see sense.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am afraid the hon. Member cannot do that. If he looks at "Erskine May" on page 383—I believe he has been so advised—he will see that he must proceed with this motion, having moved it.

Mr. Meale: In that case, without further ado, I formally move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Denis Howell, Mr. Joseph Ashton, Mr. Jim Lester, Mr. Tom Pendry, Mr. Eric S. Heffer, Mr. David Blunkett, Mr. Robert N. Wareing, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Brian Wilson, Mr. Peter L. Pike and Mr. Don Dixon.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS (NO. 2)

Mr. Alan Meale accordingly presented a Bill to establish a statutory liaison body for the sport of football, to include in its membership the various footballing authorities and their agencies, football league clubs, the Sports Council, football supporters' organisations and other necessary bodies and to make provision for changes in the organisation and function of the sport and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday and to be printed. [Bill 118.]

Opposition Day

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY] [FIRST PART]

National Health Service

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.22 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): I beg to move,

That this House rejects the Government's White Paper on the National Health Service as the basis for legislation; notes the rejection and reservations expressed by the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians through the Joint Consultants Committee, the British Medical Association, the health service unions and the Institute of Health Services Management; believes that practice budgets for general practitioners and self-managing hospitals will lead to financial restrictions being imposed on the doctors' right to prescribe medication and treatment for patients on the basis of what is clinically necessary, to the separation of general practitioners and hospital consultants irrevocably damaging the growing links between home and hospital care and reducing the quality of the overall service available to patients; urges the Government to conduct pilot studies and experiments in relation to these proposals before introducing legislation and thereby to leave time for extensive consultations with the medical and nursing professions which did not take place before the White Paper was published; and also demands that the Government announce that they will not further extend tax allowances for private health insurance or allow the cost of private medical and surgical treatment to be offset against tax since these measures would lead towards a two-tier system of health care.

The National Health Service is an issue which goes to the heart of the vast majority of the people of this country. This is therefore no ordinary debate and no ordinary subject. Ninety-five per cent. of the people of this country use their family practitioner services; in any one day, nearly two thirds of a million people consult their doctors. An issue as important as this must therefore concern all Members of this House. It is also, of course, important that more than a million people are employed by the National Health Service.

It is not new for Governments to be in conflict with the medical profession, but it is extremely rare for a Government to find themselves at odds with such a very large group of people concerned with the National Health Service. A White Paper was introduced at the start of this year without any consultation with any of the professional bodies in the National Health Service. That in itself is unique. It is thus not unduly surprising that there has been criticism—what is serious, however, is the level of the criticism.

The royal colleges, which speak for the profession not in terms of salaries but in terms of education and science and professional ethical standards, are not notorious for political criticism and most Governments have been able to find some support among the royal colleges when dealing with the National Health Service. On this occasion, however, all the royal colleges—including the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians through the joint consultants' committee—have criticised the proposals. Indeed, they have gone further and rejected them as a basis for legislation for the future of the National Health Service. The British Medical Association and the Health Service unions have also criticised the proposals. The Health Service managers have also criticised them, although in somewhat muted terms.

Taken at face value, the Government's proposals are supposed to benefit patients, but all the patients' organisations have expressed serious concern about them. It is a matter of pride and pleasure to the Social Democratic party to have the first debate on the proposals, although no doubt it is but the first of many. Hon Members of all parties have been confronted in their constituencies with a level of criticism and concern about the Government's proposals which has led Conservative Members to be deeply worried about them. I should be surprised, although perhaps not too surprised, if Conservative Members were able to support the Government amendment to the motion. The Government seem incapable of realising the depth of opposition to their proposals.

I want first to consider the central objections to the proposals. I do not believe that the Government are proposing a genuine internal market. If they were, I should be more enthusiastic about them. Rightly or wrongly, inadvertently or otherwise, the Government have produced proposals for the commercialisation of health care in its entirety. They are not even privatising it—they are commercialising it. Furthermore, they are creating not an internal market, but an open market.

The criticism of the proposals which is heard from every lip is that they involve the fragmentation of health care. Over the decades during which the NHS has operated, an important aspect of the service has been the way in which general practitioners and hospital consultants have gradually come together to provide an integrated pattern of care from home to hospital and from hospital to home. Until the White Paper was produced, it appeared to be common ground among the political parties to support that process of integration of health care—of doctors involving nurses and nurses working in hospitals and in the community, integrating community care and hospital care as part of a continuum. Suddenly, however, without any consultation, the Government have produced proposals which separate hospital health care from family practitioner care.

The proposals refer to the "self-governing" hospital. The Government seem to be trying to incorporate in the Health Service the same principles as they have applied to schools. The terminology is similar, with references to "opting out", and the marketing arrangements are also similar. But a hospital cannot be regarded as a self-contained unit. Let us examine the parallel with schools. A comprehensive school caters for pupils aged from 11 to 16 and often to 18. The school knows what is coming through, so it can plan and project, but it is impossible for a hospital to do that. It is also extremely wasteful to consider acute hospitals as separate entities.

One of the most important developments recently has been the policy to use acute hospitals intensively and on occasions to transfer patients from acute hospitals to community hospitals as a halfway house before going home. The services provided in the home—meals on wheels, health visitors, practitioner nurses and community nurses—are also an important part of the continuum of care. If provision in those areas is insufficient, people have to stay longer in hospital. If there is high-quality care in the

community and at home, it is possible to have more day surgery—something that is increasing all the time—and shorter stays in hospital, thus cutting costs.

One of the absurdities of debates about the National Health Service that is all too often apparent in the House are the great boasts about the number of people treated in hospital. The number has increased significantly, of course, because we have been able to increase the throughput in hospitals and to shorten the time that patients spend there. That is highly desirable, but it adds to hospital costs and additional hospital personnel are needed.

It is essential to see the Health Service in the round, as a whole. This is where the fundamental flaw in the Government's proposals arises. They have us talking about the self-governing hospital, when what we should be talking about is the self-governing district health authority because it is the district health authority which provides the continuum of care. We talk about general practice budgets as though the budget of the general practitioner could be separated, as though it existed in isolation from hospital costs and social services costs. When in the past such distinctions have been proposed there has been sufficient flexibility in the Health Service to take account of them.

For example, some years ago it was decided that a cash limit should be placed on hospital prescribing—I remember this because I was actually prescribing in hospitals at the time—so instead of the epileptic clinic prescribing for three months for a person being seen on a three-month cycle, one prescribed for two or three days and shunted the rest of the bill off to the general practitioner. The patient did not mind tremendously, although the general practitioner objected slightly, and we overcame the problem simply by shuffling the hospital pharmacy budget on to the general practitioner. In reality, it cost the Health Service more because hospitals prescribed cheaper drugs bought in bulk, while general practitioners prescribed drugs from the local pharmacy.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): The right hon. Gentleman is being rather negative. Can he tell us how his internal market would work? How is it possible to have an internal market without doctor choice as to consultants, without patient choice, and without some differentiation in style of hospital?

Dr. Owen: I will deal with that when I come to it in the course of my argument. I prefer to develop first the logical case that general practice costs cannot be separated from hospital costs and that hitherto there has been a thoroughly reputable movement to bring the two together, rather than to separate and fragment them.

To return to the analogy of pharmaceutical costs, if a limit is put on the family practitioner's budget as well as on the hospital budget, there will be no way out because there will be no flexibility. That is rightly seen by general practitioners as limiting their clinical freedom to choose the type of treatment that they think best for the individual patient, so if the Government insist on it they will be starting to challenge a very fundamental aspect of medical practice.

These ill-thought-out proposals come at a moment when a large part of the Health Service agrees that there is a need for medical audit. There is now not only a great deal of consent to medical audit within hospitals but a growing recognition of a need for medical audit within general practice and of the need for the medical profession to be held accountable for the costs that it incurs. It is beginning to be recognised that one cannot have a narrow concept of medical freedom—freedom to prescribe exactly what one wants, and to treat exactly as one wants—because that works back. As there is an overall limit to the amount of money that any Government will put into the Health Service, one has to accept some restriction on one's freedom to treat all patients as ideally as one would wish.

Medical audit—the concept of being held accountable for costs—is accepted by the medical and nursing professions and there is a growing understanding of the techniques involved, so why have the Government brought in a blunderbuss in the form of the White Paper? Why do they seek to legislate for those proposals to be applied across the board without a pilot study for a practice budget or any real understanding of self-governing hospitals other than that gained from six experiments, which have wisely been undertaken, in resource management in hospitals?

It is important to remember that, in five out of six hospitals, those responsible for the experiment in resource management have all said that it is far too early to move to self-governing hospitals and that many more lessons need to be learned. They have asked that their hospitals should continue with the experiment and not be diverted by the question of self-governing hospitals. It is not surprising that those five hospitals—the exception is Guy's—which have pioneered new techniques and want to continue the experiment, and which are going with the trend of modern medicine and modern management, should be coming out in criticism of the Government's proposals. Those who manage the Health Service say that the Government's proposals are ill thought out, with consequences that are difficult to foresee, most of them deeply damaging to the NHS.

It is not as though that was always what the Government intended. The proposition for an internal market, which the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) asked me to discuss, was put into the public domain by Professor Alan Enthoven of Stanford university more than six years ago. Those proposals were bitterly criticised, often by the Department itself, as impractical and undesirable.

It is well known that the Social Democratic party thought that there was considerable merit in the application of an internal market as proposed by Professor Enthoven, but he did not propose self-governing hospitals or general practice budgets—he suggested that district health authorities should be given far greater autonomy to manage the district health authority, free from regional control, and that there should be a modest market between the district health authorities, with some element of patient choice.

We argued then, as we argued today, that the first step towards an internal market is for patients to be given choice so that, faced with a long waiting list in a district health authority—as sadly happens all too frequently, particularly in elective surgery—they should have the right to go to another district health authority with a shorter waiting list, confident in the knowledge that the bill for that will not be taken up by the district health authority which has reduced its waiting list but by the district health authority whence the patients came. That gives an incentive to districts with shorter waiting lists to take

[Dr. Owen]

patients from other districts, and acts as a financial discipline on district health authorities with long waiting lists.

If a district health authority decides that it does not wish to build up its expertise or be self-sufficient in a particular speciality, it will be prepared to accept the cost, knowing what that cost will be. In such a system, the money really does follow the patient. The patient makes the choice, advised by the general practitioner who will need information about waiting lists in neighbouring district health authorities.

Not every patient can move. To put a young mother in a hospital 50 or 60 miles from her home creates a major social problem, quite apart from the considerable costs involved. Although that is the most effective way of dealing with the immediate problem of waiting lists, introducing a welcome measure of patient choice, to be realistic for poorer families it must be accompanied by generous help with the cost of going to hospital and of a minimum visiting programme. We already encounter that problem with perinatal care. Where there are not full facilities for dealing with the highly specialised treatment of prematurely born children, the mother and child have to be taken to a specialised unit. The family then faces very heavy costs for a period of six weeks or more with practically no financial support. That aspect must be dealt with.

Such a system, which is the true internal market that has been discussed for the last five years and criticised by the Department of Health, is now being thrown out of the window as being of no significance and we suddenly have a new proposal for self-governing hospitals. Where did the proposal come from? What great genius created it?

If, as is clear, the medical profession objects, as does the Royal College of Nursing, and if the Institute of Health Services Management foresees considerable problems, do the Government still intend to shunt the proposals through? Are we to have the Official Secrets Act all over again? Will Tory Members behave like Lobby fodder and vote for the proposals? There will be a test of that later today.

How can any Conservative genuinely vote for the Government amendment? Perhaps I should read it out to them. It seeks to leave out from 'House' to end and add

"expresses full support for the proposals set out in the White Paper 'Working for Patients' and believes that these will lead to a Health Service that is more responsive to the needs of patients".

I hope that general practitioners in the constituencies of Conservative Members who vote for the amendment will ask a few questions tomorrow. If consultation is to mean anything, surely the Government could have phrased it better and said:

"expresses the belief that this forms a reasonable basis on which to progress, in consultation with the medical profession".

We are already being told by the Minister of State that there are to be no Dr. Noes and no change in the proposals. We are told that they are to be pushed through. *[Interruption.]* The Minister has been widely reported as saying that there will be no Dr. Noes. If he did not say that, I am only too delighted.

The Government need to face the fact that there are serious problems in the Health Service. It has caused deep resentment in the Health Service that the White Paper did not in any section address underfunding. By any standards, that must be one problem. I agree that the medical profession always wants more money. The Government cannot blame it for that. The teaching profession always wants more money, too. Everybody always wants more money. But it is a fact of life that in comparison with the service in almost any other industrial democratic nation, our National Health Service is asked to carry on with a lower percentage of GDP devoted to it.

The figure in this country is 6 per cent. The average for OECD countries is 7·5 per cent. In the United States the figure is 11 per cent., and in France and Germany it is 8 per cent. to 9 per cent. We are told that the White Paper is to bring about the most radical change in health services since the National Health Service Act 1946. Yet it does not even address financial under-investment. It is no wonder that people who work in the Health Service are asking themselves, "Can the Government really be serious about these proposals?"

Only a few days ago, Bassetlaw district health authority produced an interesting proposal. Instead of asking for its hospital to be part of a self-governing unit, it put in a detailed proposal to the Ministry that it should be allowed to form a National Health Service trust and that, within the National Health Service, the whole district—hospital and community care—should be allowed to be self-governing. It also proposed that the regional health authority should hold the budget and should be the accounting officer. The district health authority went to Price Waterhouse for an assessment of its capacity to do that.

That is the internal market that is really being suggested, and I believe that a pilot study should be conducted into it. Although I am deeply committed to the whole concept of an internal market, the SDP has always argued that it cannot be introduced overnight, that pilot studies must be carried out to prove that it can be done and that the information system on which the management of an internal market critically depends does not exist in the NHS at present. We have argued that it will take many years to develop to its true sophistication before we have an internal market, such as that which I suggested at district level, operating throughout the country. Despite that, however, the Government have introduced proposals for self-governing hospitals, which people do not want. The Government want 200 to 300 of them operating by 1992. What world are they living in? It is certainly not the world in which the majority of people using and operating the NHS live.

There are technical issues. The problem with the White Paper is that of an underlying dogma which is far more ominous. With the Finance Bill we are seeing the first step towards the more dogmatised, ideological basis of the Government's reforms—health insurance tax relief for those aged over 60. Many Conservative Members voted for that proposal, but I hope that before it is implemented, and later extended to the whole of the working population, they will think through the implications. Since the original Tory opposition to the 1948 legislation, it has been a Right-wing dream to have tax relief on health insurance.

One of the more amusing issues in recent months has been the criticism of the doctors. Department of Health Ministers have claimed that if the doctors had had their way originally there would not have been a National Health Service. They forget to mention that if the

Conservative party had had its way, there would not have been an NHS either because Tory Members of the day voted against the legislation.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): How does the right hon. Gentleman explain the 1944 White Paper which set out the basic principles on which the NHS was founded? The Health Minister at the time was a Conservative.

Dr. Owen: Mr. Brown's White Paper, initially in 1943, followed by the actions of Henry Willink in 1944, was one of the best examples of a coalition Government that we have seen. The social legislation of the 1940s, on education, and so on—R. A. Butler's measure—was important, and if one cares to do so, one can go back in the history of the NHS to the Socialist Medical Association of the early 1930s. Even the British Medical Association had moved its position by the late 1930s. As with most radical changes, a considerable breadth of consensus was needed. It was surprising that when the original NHS Bill came forward from Aneurin Bevan, Sir Winston Churchill and the Tory party opposed it with great vigour. Fortunately, the Conservatives did not overturn the Act in 1951 when they were returned to office.

Since 1948, the NHS has had the unanimous support of all political parties in Britain and, by and large, that has been sustained across the transfers of Government. Now, however, the Government have introduced their White Paper, and there is no question but that if there were a further extension of tax relief for private health insurance covering the whole working population, we would inexorably be heading for a two-tier health service and the American system of health care. If that were buttressed by the demands, of which we hear and about which we read in the newspapers, for tax relief on the cost of private medical treatment or in respect of private surgical treatment—we gather that that is being demanded by some Conservative Back Benchers—the movement towards a two-tier system would be very rapid indeed.

Against that philosophical background, we must consider the other aspects of the White Paper. The Prime Minister is among the small percentage of the population who do not use the NHS. She seems genuinely to believe that if one can pay for private insurance, one almost has a moral obligation to opt out of the NHS, freeing resources for use elsewhere in the service. But the NHS is based on a different concept. It is based on the principle of "count everyone in"—that everyone has insurance cover, that the service is provided for the whole of the population and that nobody, rich or poor, need opt out. There are great advantages in a health care system in which rich and poor participate and all are treated the same, with the judgment being made on the basis of clinical need. We would be taking a major step if we encouraged people to feel that they had a moral obligation to opt out of health care purely and simply because they had enough money to pay for private health insurance.

Let us look at the Government's proposals for self-governing, autonomous hospitals. It is very nice perhaps for teaching hospitals to opt out, but one of the problems of the teaching hospitals, particularly in London, is that they are already opting out of some of their community health responsibilities. If the Minister were to tell us that a particular hospital specialised in orthopaedic work, such as hip replacement operations, and was doing virtually nothing else and that there was a case for the hospital being autonomous and run as a self-managing unit, people would say that we ought to try it and would feel that such a move was not unreasonable, since the hospital was not providing a district service and was not part of the health care pattern. If the Government were to encourage that hospital or some other specialised hospital to opt out as an experiment, no one would get very upset about it. Our objection is to taking out the district general hospital—the very core of our intergrated health care—and managing and financing it separately.

Let us take another example. It is suggested that the hospital trusts should have different terms of employment. There is much to be said for a district health authority being the employing authority, having the freedom to employ and making its own contracts. Hospital consultants should have contracts not with the region but with the district health authority. The family practitioner committees should come under the district health authority. If one integrated the district with the family practitioner health service one would create what is, in American terms, a health maintenance organisation, and one would be much better able to achieve some of the benefits that the Government are trying to achieve with the general practitioners contract.

Many of the preventive health measures in the new GP's contract are beneficial to medicine and, operating within the concept of a district health authority, could be of great benefit. But in fact the GP practice is to be fragmented and regarded as a separate unit. That will not work, or, if it does work, it will damage the overall integrated health care pattern.

On top of this, we have been waiting for years for proposals on the community health services, but they have not yet been brought forward. How on earth is it possible to legislate for the National Health Service and to formulate views on the family practitioner service and on the hospital service without any idea how the Government intend to handle the community health service? Those concepts are not separate abstractions—they are closely integrated.

Let us take, for example, the question of joint funding which I introduced when I was Minister of Health. Its prime purpose was to bring the social services, hospital services and family practitioner services together, and to provide some money to grease the wheels for integration. How can one consider this White Paper in the absence of any provision for community health? I hope that in this debate the Government will listen to the views of their own Back Benchers—to whom they listen more readily, I fear, than to Opposition Members.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Will they?

Dr. Owen: We must take a realistic view of these matters. I am sad about it. I should like to believe that every word that we spoke would be taken with the utmost seriousness in the Department of Health, but I suspect that four or five speeches of opposition from Conservative Back Benchers might have more impact on No. 10 Downing street, if not on the Department of Health.

This debate is our first real opportunity to flag up that the basis of the White Paper will not provide legislation which will carry the Health Service workers with the Government or carry the country with the Government but will do grave damage to the National Health Service. The question is how to get the Government off the hook.

[Dr. Owen]

That is the issue that Conservative Back Benchers should be worrying about. Here there are some real possibilities that I should like to encourage the House to consider.

First, it would be much better to get the question of the GP contract out of the way as quickly as possible—"Give 'em the money, Barney" used to be the expression, or "Stuff their mouths with gold," as Aneurin Bevan put it. I admit that at one moment when we were in office and when it looked as though we had the hospital doctors, the junior hospital doctors and the general practitioners all opposed to us, we found a way of paying GPs for contraceptive advice. I felt that that was part of the contract of general practitioners and I was bitterly opposed to paying it, but I am afraid that I paid up, so it would not be the first or the last time that Governments have paid up.

That is not, however, what is necessary now because most of the criticisms of the GPs' contract can be overcome by a modification of some of the objections which are fairly soundly based. For example, the criticism made of the immunisation percentage is a real one, although I cannot for the life of me see why we do not put an obligation on parents, when their children enter school or when they claim child benefit, to show that they have participated in an immunisation programme. Making it all a responsibility of general practitioners is wrong. Parents have a responsibility to see that the immunisation programme is undertaken and it is part of the general practitioner's contract to see that it is done or done by the school health service.

Similarly with the cervical cancer smear service, the percentage figure is very high and people have reasonable objections to that. In dealing with the withdrawal of seniority payments, it is necessary to protect pension rights. Something can also be done about payment for night calls. It is not beyond the wit, certainly of the Secretary of State, if he sets his mind to it, to resolve these problems. He is obviously worried that if he makes a few concessions here the British Medical Association will come back asking for more and he will have to negotiate it.

Let the Government settle the issue of the contract in the next couple of months and then deal with the substantive problem, the National Health Service review. Having done that, let them get the GPs to accept medical audit to the extent that hospital consultants have accepted it. Let them extend resource management in the Health Service from the six hospitals that operate it now to 100 hospitals, and gradually build up an information system. Then let them conduct some experiments or pilot studies.

If, for example, a few hospitals are highly specialised and not part of the district health authority, let us have a look at running them autonomously. If there are a few people with large practices who are keen to run a practice budget, let them have a go at it. Legislation is not needed for any of that.

Mr. Day: That is exactly what is being said.

Dr. Owen: No, it is not exactly what is being said. The Government have been arguing for more than 200 hospitals to be operated as autonomous, self-governing units within a short period.

As regards practices, the Government are saying that it is up to the general practitioner——

Mr. Day: It is voluntary.

Dr. Owen: No, it is not voluntary. The Government have so changed the other arrangements for general practitioners that they are giving a considerable incentive to go for practice opt-outs. This is what the Royal College of General Practitioners and the General Medical Services Committee object to. If it were a free choice——

Mr. Day: It is.

Dr. Owen: It is not. Hon. Members must look at the proposals carefully and, I suggest, talk to a few of their local general practitioners. They will find that the criticism of the proposal is not that they are allowed to take an "opt out" decision for their own particular practice. What GPs object to is that the structuring of general practice payments and arrangements makes it difficult for them not to go in that direction. There is not just an incentive but a stick pushing them in that direction. That is what they object to, and they are quite right to object.

It is in any case not the right direction. The right direction is to integrate the family practitioner committees with the district health authority, and to try to produce a system of incentives that will encourage preventive medicine and health maintenance. In keeping down the costs of hospitalisation of a patient, the GP works with the consultant and both have an incentive to keep the patient in hospital for as short a time as possible. That saves money for the district health authority, and they all benefit in consequence. That is not fragmenting care—it is integrating care. It is getting cost-effectiveness through a much better provision of care by bringing hospital and home care together.

That is the direction in which the Secretary of State should proceed if he is wise. His problem is that overshadowing it all is the Prime Minister, who wishes to change the National Heath Service fundamentally. We should be under no illusions about this. The Prime Minister wants a two-tier health service, and she openly admits it in the House. She wants a system under which those who can pay private health insurance will do so. She thinks that it is quite right that the 40 per cent. of people who can afford to do so should operate within a broadly private health system. They would have a safety net so that if they were hit by a car on the M4 they would be taken to the local hospital. However, broadly speaking, the health care of such people will be taken outside the National Health Service.

For the other 60 per cent. of the population, the Prime Minister accepts that there should be a safety net and a health care system that is as good as can be afforded. Her Government would not spend too much money on that because it will be public sector money.

There is nothing new about such a system—it operated in this country in the 1920s and 1930s. It was rejected by the people when the National Health Service was created in 1948, and many of us are determined that it should not be reintroduced through either the front or the back door. Such a system underlies many of these proposals and it will be introduced unless they are rejected.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Does the right hon. Gentleman think that consultants should opt to work in either the National Health Service or the private sector, or that the present position should continue?

Dr. Owen: I have reluctantly come to the conclusion over many years that we shall have to accept the Aneurin Bevan compromise in which doctors work in both the public and private health service, and we have a mixed provision of health care. Ideally, I should like doctors to work full time in the National Health Service, as I did. Had I stayed, I should always have worked full time in the NHS. However, we have to live with the system under which doctors cherish the right to practise privately part of the time. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is a two-tier system."] It is not a two-tier system at all. The private health care system that operates in this country is a small part of the overall health care system—a safety valve. It operates—and has done so under successive Governments—without serious detriment to the National Health Service.

If there was a serious attack on NHS waiting lists, they could be reduced, and then much of the motivation to expand the private sector would be withdrawn. There will always be some people who would like to have the freedom to choose their own doctor, but we cannot offer that choice to the whole population. It produces only a minor distortion of the system and, provided it operates at a fairly low level, it can be tolerated as part of the mixed health care system. However, that is not a two-tier system, or the one which we had before the National Health Service. Many of us are determined to ensure that it is not introduced.

Having listened to the debate I realise that a number of Conservative Members need to discuss these matters a bit more with some of their constituents if there are not to be many tears over the next few years. Nobody should underestimate the extent and depth of feeling against the proposals. The nursing profession is now almost more important than the medical profession to the successful running of the Health Service. There is a reasonable surplus of doctors, but there is an acute shortage of nurses, who have to be encouraged to return and stay in the Health Service. We cannot, therefore, dismiss the view of the nurses, let alone the views of the medical profession. Above all, we should not exclude the views of the patients.

The Government should be able to come forward with some level of support for their proposals from the people whom the proposals are meant to serve. If there is merit in them, it should be possible to point to patients who want them, but I have found no evidence of popular demand for any of the substantive proposals—which have been criticised—put forward in the White Paper.

Mr. Day: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that while there is much feeling against the White Paper it is against the myths surrounding it rather than the actual proposals? The myths are largely created by organisations such as the British Medical Association.

Dr. Owen: The BMA is bound to be in conflict with the Ministers. I am reminded of the story of David Lloyd George, who went to the BMA when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. When he came out of the meeting he said that he felt "like Daniel leaving the lion's den, the only difference being that those lions knew their anatomy." A mauling of Health Ministers by the British Medical Association is par for the course, but it is not par for the course for them to receive a mauling from the royal colleges of physicians, surgeons, general practitioners, obstetricians, gynaecologists and from the Royal College of Nursing. The degree of opposition that the White Paper has roused within and without the National Health Service, and the total lack of support from patients, is not commonplace.

When Aneurin Bevan had trouble with the BMA, at least he had the patients on his side. It is clear from this debate that nobody—apart from Tory Members—seems prepared to vote for the Government's splendid amendment to the effect that everything in the garden is fine. Here is an opportunity for Conservative Members to abstain—to disappear quietly so that they are not here to vote for the Government's self-congratulatory amendment. In doing so, they may do themselves a great service. In voting with the Government they will be doing the Opposition a great service.

5.7 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'expresses full support for the proposals set out in the White Paper "Working for Patients" and believes that these will lead to a Health Service that is more responsive to the needs of patients, and will enable those hospitals which best meet the needs of patients to get the money to do so, will reduce waiting times, improve the quality of care, help family doctors to develop the services they provide for their patients, improve the effectiveness of National Health Service management, and ensure that all those concerned with delivering health care make the best use of the resources available to them.'.

I am glad that we have had the opportunity of debating this matter today. I wondered when an Opposition Supply day would be devoted to the topic. It is interesting that, whatever the Labour party may have to say about the White Paper, it has not been enthusiastic to table such a motion. Apart from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), who has to be here, there is only one other Labour Member in the Chamber. Admittedly, it is always a pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on these matters.

It may be that the Labour party lacks enthusiasm for a full-scale debate because it would not be long before its threadbare thinking on the need for positive change in the NHS would be revealed. Into that vacuum, in a rather unexpected way, has moved the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and his motion. We heard a typically self-indulgent performance, expanding over 43 minutes, from the right hon. Member. Perhaps in future two-and-a-half-hour debates the right hon. Gentleman will use notes so that he might be able to deliver his speech a little quicker and more accurately. What he said was full of misconceptions about the White Paper.

One thing which could always be said of the right hon. Gentleman was that if he thought that the Government had a point—or even half a point—he was always prepared to acknowledge it. The interesting point about his contribution to this debate is the uneasy way—often resorting to making distinctions on the head of a pin—in which he seeks to distinguish between the Government's concept of an internal market in the NHS and the one that he claims to have popularised.

I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman—intoxicated, as his last remarks made clear by the thought that every man's hand was against the proposals, which is far from the case—has fallen into the trap of the lowest common denominator of Opposition. He would have done himself

[Mr. David Mellor]

a greater service if he had acknowledged that much of the thinking in the White Paper reflects a number of issues that obviously occurred to him when he wrote his book and when the SDP published its document.

The best I can find to say about the motion is that it could have been drafted by the Labour party. The right hon. Gentleman used not to be pleased to hear such words. However, he knows full well that, in his book, he makes it clear that he is interested in a more consumerist NHS, wants an internal market to be developed and a national health authority with substantial autonomy. He makes it clear that he wants improved resource management with measures to improve the cost awareness of professionals. He makes it clear that he understands the case for management of the NHS to be much freer and at a lower level.

It is astonishing that the right hon. Gentleman should base his objections to the Government's proposals on the distinction between self-governing hospitals and semi-independent district health authorities. Bassetlaw may well have snookered him by producing proposals at which we are looking with great interest.

The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that the concepts set out in the White Paper reflect an awareness at which everyone except members of the Labour party must surely arrive: if the NHS is to meet the challenge of the next decade it must be more cost-effective in its delivery of services. The "Green Paper"—presumably the right hon. Gentleman not only wrote it but cut down the trees to pulp the paper, given its one-man-band nature—states:

"The SDP believes that the introduction of an internal market into the National Health Service would yield a number of benefits. Firstly, health managers would be able to use resources in a more effective manner. They would be free to buy services from other suppliers who offered good value, and by careful investment of their own resources attract income from other health authorities. The move to an internal market would provide an incentive to develop a more sophisticated financial management and information system. It would also provide a strong incentive to review existing methods of service delivery . . . Funding will in effect follow the patient, bringing an important transfer of power in favour of patients."

It is regrettable that the right hon. Gentleman has failed to accept that such notions—whether they embody his own concept of an internal market, which no doubt he would be bound to admit was less than fully argued through in his book and presented very sketchily today, or our kind of concept—start from a common root of recognition that unless the NHS becomes more consumerist and is managed more effectively lower down the scale—unless there is some freedom for finance to cross the arbitrary district boundaries that now inhibit the proper delivery of care—we shall not meet the challenge of the next decade. It is regrettable that the right hon. Gentleman has seen fit to kow-tow in this way, notably in the article that he produced in the *Daily Express* on Saturday. I do not know whether any other hon. Members have read it.

Although the article went on at some length, no one reading it would have dreamt for a moment that the right hon. Gentleman had ever thought about internal markets. Of course, it contained much good advice. It called my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State "insouciant", and told him what wise heads would do—which, in the light of the right hon. Gentleman's political career, is a bit like King Farouk telling people how to run a kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Or Roy Jenkins.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. Gentleman says: "when you are in a hole, stop digging."
Who better than he to formulate such advice?

The right hon. Gentleman knows only too well that when he was in office he was not deflected by opposition from groups that he considered to be standing up for more vested interests than for progress. He has conceded in most of his subsequent writings that what he proposed then was wrong. But the idea that the doctors, or indeed any other group within the NHS, should be the final arbiters of a change in what is actually the patients' service strikes me as a further retreat from the principle of which the right hon. Gentleman should be less than proud.

Let me make a positive case for the concepts in the review. I shall do so as briefly as possible, so that the maximum number of hon. Members will have an opportunity to speak—more than 40 minutes having been taken, quite unnecessarily in my respectful judgment, to open the debate.

The first crucial point is that the past 10 years have been years of expansion for the NHS, in which funding has increased considerably. Had we merely continued the level of funding that existed 10 years ago, this year the NHS would be spending just under £19 billion at 1989-90 prices. In fact, it will be spending more than £26 billion. We know that nearly 1·5 million more in-patients a year are being treated by the NHS than were treated 10 years ago, while 3·25 million more out-patients and 500,000 more day cases are being dealt with.

Those statistics are familiar; I need not go over them. However, the expansion of the NHS has not, in truth, made the service any easier to run in 1989 than it was in 1979. If we had dared to predict such expansion 10 years ago, people would have thought first that a tripling of cash expenditure within a decade was not possible, and secondly that if it were possible—imagining that signing a large cheque is the fundamental way of dealing with the NHS—we would be in an easier position. We are not. The job of balancing priorities will become more rather than less difficult in the years ahead.

The reason is clear: demand for the NHS is growing, and will continue to grow inexorably. That is partly for demographic reasons: we are an aging population, and, important and good though that is, it imposes large costs on the NHS. Secondly, the frontiers of medical science are being continually pushed forward, mostly into expensive, high-technology developments. Thirdly, people are no longer content, for instance, to wear a body support for a hernia or a surgical stocking for varicose veins; they require an operation. People's thresholds for seeking treatment are being constantly lowered, which is not unreasonable. The service is there and people want to use it.

Finally, people are no longer content for the NHS to be simply a service for sickness. They want it to be a service for health. They want more prevention techniques, and they want the full benefit of primary health care to go to those who think that they are healthy but who may not be, so that they can be screened for conditions that can be dealt with at an early stage. Such things are possible in this decade. They were not possible in the decade during which

the right hon. Gentleman had custody of the NHS, because he spent most of his time having to argue that the NHS could not be protected from funding problems.

I know that what I am saying is not palatable to the right hon. Gentleman, but I listened to most of his speech, and I feel that he could at least do me the courtesy of listening to mine. The right hon. Gentleman is not always alone in having a valuable contribution to make to a debate, and having started this one he should, I think, listen to what the rest of us have to say.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that in the current decade the 20 per cent. increase in the number of general practitioners, and the 50 per cent. increase in the number of support staff for them—including the doubling of practice nurse members—have made possible primary care teams that could not have been dreamt of in the 1970s. As a consequence a great gap has been opened between those who are providing that full range of services and those who are not.

The task of Government is not to sit back and say, "Chacun à son goût; let any doctor do what he chooses", but to try to ensure, through the contract and in other ways, that health care reaches high standards everywhere, and that the contract not only rewards effort but stimulates further effort. To my mind there is not too much difference between that kind of consumerist approach and that which, until it became politically expedient not to do so, the right hon. Gentleman supported.

The gravamen of the right hon. Gentleman's charge when the debate was announced was his hostility to the "commercialisation" of the NHS, whatever that may mean. But unless the NHS is prepared to use the techniques of cost-effectiveness that have been so successful elsewhere it will be incapable of meeting those demands, even within the rising budget that we all want. Let us take, for instance, competitive tendering. I do not know whether in his present mode the right hon. Gentleman would consider that commercialisation, but we have saved nearly £110 million simply by not accepting that the way in which things have always been done is the way in which they should be done in the future.

Interestingly, 85 per cent. of the contracts that were reconsidered went in-house, showing that there were savings to be made if only people could be bothered to try. All that £110 million has gone back into the service. To put it another way, the equivalent of one and a half Great Ormond street hospitals have been saved by the service tightening up on washing and cleaning costs.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: If the hon. Lady does not mind I will not give way: I am trying to be quick.

The same is true of a range of other efficiency savings. Some £740 million has been allocated elsewhere in the system. A tighter view has been taken of prescribing. Most people now admit that all the fuss over the limited list was based on two entirely false premises—damage to patients and that savings would not be made. We said that £75 million a year would be saved, and £75 million has been saved for four years now. Some £300 million that was being spent on over-priced branded cough mixtures on prescription is now going into the "front end" of patient care.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I hope that my hon. Friend will concede that at the end of the consultation period the limited list was three times longer than it was at the beginning of the consultation period, because his predecessors listened to hon. Members on all sides of the House. I hope that he will assure the House that he will do the same in regard to the doctors' contracts.

Mr. Mellor: Another unfairness in the speech of the right hon. Member for Devonport was that he suggested, by distorting phrases ripped out of context from my speeches and those of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health, that we were seeking to ram those changes willy-nilly down the throat of the profession. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that the Government have a duty to set the direction in which the service should go. The publication of the working papers, the intensive discussions that are taking place and the invitation to co-operate that lies at the heart of all our proposals are designed to work with the grain of the system.

Of course, as we receive representations, whether they are about details of the contract or suggest ways in which we can better apply the financial principles in the resources management initiative, their voices will be heard and we shall not hesitate to change our minds. That is what we have been saying throughout the process. I am glad to say that the media who first wanted to report war-war have belatedly become interested in jaw-jaw and are reporting passages from my speeches saying that the proposals were not tablets of stone. We are looking for a genuine dialogue and we are only too ready to alter course and change practical details if that is required. We have a duty to lay down the basic thrust of the proposals and to carry them forward because they are right.

The right hon. Gentleman's house was built on sand. He based his case on the fact that we were compelling GPs to have practice budgets and hospitals to become self-governing. But only general practices of a certain size are being invited to apply for practice budgets, and those who do not wish to do so do not have to. Pilot schemes are a practical way of testing whether budgeting will work. The practices concerned will open negotiations—and plenty of them are ready to do so—if the negotiations flourish they will accept the budget and if the negotiations are unsuccessful they will walk away. No one is being compelled to take a budget. If the system works it will grow, and if it does not, as I said on the radio, it will be consigned to history. What could be fairer than that?

The same applies to self-governing hospitals. Of course we are entitled to say that we hope that the majority of acute hospitals will follow up but it is entirely their choice and there is no shortage of interest. What is meant by self-governing hospitals? Far from the right hon. Gentleman's uncharacteristic sloppiness in suggesting that the proposal was carried across from the education reforms, we have never used the words "opting out". We are saying that in the interest of good Health Service management it should be reduced to the lowest level consistent with being able to develop the best patient care. Given the calibre of people interested in becoming involved in special health authorities in London, the attractions of self-governing hospitals with the politics removed—attracting the best people from the community and the best managers to deliver the best service—are clear.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): In referring to opting out or self-governing hospitals, the Minister repeatedly said, "It is entirely their choice." To whom was he referring?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman knows well that the White Paper makes it clear that it is for various interested groups to come forward with proposals, and for the Secretary of State to determine whether those proposals should be implemented. I have told the hon. Gentleman what the White Paper states on that.

The White Paper is based on concepts which every patient and everyone concerned with the NHS wants—quality, responsiveness and value for money. As the Institute of Health Services Management has made clear in regard to the present funding of the NHS hospital service, a good unit that gets through its list and carries out more operations than average, runs into financial difficulties nine or 10 months into the financial year, while a unit that coasts along and does not extend itself is funded on exactly the same basis for ever and a day and, of course, does not run into financial difficulties. With money following the patient, something that the right hon. Gentleman used to advocate—well might he hold his head in his hands—those units that are good are allowed to reach their proper level. Surely that is in the best interest of patients.

We want a more consumerist Health Service. We are beyond the point at which, after the great battle to establish the Health Service, it was possible for the profession or anyone else to say that the NHS was doing the public a favour simply by allowing people to pass through its portals. It was regarded as deeply radical by some general practitioners that there should be an appointments system, but now it is accepted. Why should hospitals not be the same? Why should patients turn up at 9.30 and be seen at 12.30? Why should the conditions for many out-patients be so disgraceful?

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Because of the lack of funding.

Mr. Mellor: I have already mentioned the increase in funding. The problems to which I referred often relate to priorities and attitudes rather than money. The idea that everyone should be acquitted of any dereliction of duty by the parrot cries about funding is typical of how spurious NHS debates often become. We all know that it relates to attitudes. We all hope that when cash follows the patient, NHS patients will become as valuable commodities to the medical profession and others as private patients. That day is long overdue.

Finally, I turn to value for money. Given the demands on the Health Service in the next decade, unless we can deliver health care efficiently and effectively, we shall not meet the increased pace of demand. Sometimes the argument is satirised as if it is simply a matter of making cuts or signing a large cheque, but the argument is about providing a quality of care that meets the demands of patients. Even within an expanding budget it will be a struggle. Value for money—a good quality of care at a sensible cost—is the way forward.

We all know that there are hospitals capable of carrying out operations on a day care basis. I visited one in Burton where 50 per cent. of the operations were carried out on a day care basis. In many other parts of the country people are in-patients for two to three days. Conducting operations on a day care basis is not selling the patient short. Most patients do not want to stay overnight in hospital and do so only because the present system demands it. Our proposals are based on straightforward concepts that have been carried through to beneficial effect elsewhere in the economy. The NHS must not become a mausoleum to outdated managerial practices. The NHS is in the forefront of medical advance and should be in the forefront of financial and other management if we are to have the NHS that we need.

It will be interesting to hear other speeches in the debate and to find out whether any other parts of the House are capable of yielding up positive proposals such as those in the White Paper. People should be concerned not merely to stir up easy points by suggesting that the profession is against one proposal and the public are worried about another, but to find some way of ensuring that we deliver health care more effectively. At the moment, only the Conservative party is rising to that very real challenge.

5.27 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): It is highly significant, and will be greeted with dismay by the public and the professions outside the House, that the Minister failed to address any of the very real concerns that have been raised about the White Paper. He did not address any of the concerns that were well articulated by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen).

When will the House have a full debate on the White Paper? While I welcome the opportunity provided by this brief debate to begin discussion on the White Paper, it is quite wrong that the country should be discussing the White Paper yet the House has not had the opportunity to have a full debate. It is particularly wrong because the Government are already progressing with their plans, and have even gone so far as to appoint finance managers to run hospitals which have yet to opt out under system which has yet to be debated in the House. I should have thought that the Secretary of State should come forward urgently to discuss those plans in the House. The House is the only place in which the Government are likely to hear any support for their proposals, largely thanks to the Government Whips.

It is in keeping with the way in which the review has been dealt with from the outset that we have not had a chance to debate it fully in the House. The review was not, of course, a response to public concern about the shortage of resources in the Health Service. The original idea of the review was to give Ministers a breathing space and to sweep the issue under the carpet. It gave Ministers something to say when, week by week, day after day, they had to respond at the Dispatch Box to the concerns about lengthening waiting lists and cancelled operations.

But away from public involvement and any professional advice, the review has unfortunately mutated into a monster which aims to inflict on us the same chaos and misery that the American health care system inflicts on the American people. If there had been any public or professional consultation during the review process, it is inconceivable that the Government could have come up with the commercialisation of the National Health Service.

There is a broad and deep consensus about the Health Service, which only the Government stand outside. People understand that the commercialisation of health care will drive down the quality of health services, drive up costs by saddling the Health Service with a monstrous bureaucracy

and undermine the doctor-patient relationship by putting a price tag on each patient's head. It is clear to everybody that the Government are interested not in a healthy patient, but only in a healthy bank balance.

Doctors', nurses' and health workers' unions have all warned that the White Paper proposals will cut down patient choice, not increase it, and will reduce our chance of developing preventative health services. The proposals will hit hardest those who need help the most—the chronically sick, the disabled and the elderly. The fact that the weight of public opinion is overwhelmingly against the proposals and that the weight of professional opinion is unanimously against them must be a grave disappointment to the Government, especially as they have invested a great deal of public money—more than £1·25 million—in a shameful attempt to mislead the public and health professionals about what the proposals constitute. I challenge the Minister to name even one reputable, independent organisation that knows anything about the issue which supports the proposals. There is none.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Seven million pounds has been spent in opposing the White Paper. Does the hon. Lady think that the British Medical Association should use general practitioners' surgeries as a way of putting across its propaganda to the sick and the elderly?

Ms. Harman: It is for the British Medical Association to decide what it does with its members' money. What the Government do with taxpayers' money is a matter for all of us. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman cannot tell the difference.

The Secretary of State and his Ministers have become angry about the fact that they have not been able to buy public or professional opinion, so they have resorted to smear tactics: they have said that the doctors are simply reaching for their wallets and that the nurses are merely a vested interest who must be overridden. The Government remain determined not to listen to argument, not to consider the evidence and not to respond to public concern. Nothing in the Minister's speech suggested that he has listened to the points made so strongly.

The evidence is clear: we need more resources in the Health Service. It seems that even that message has not got through to the Minister. We spend less per head on health care than most other European countries and only a little more than half what Americans spend for an inferior system.

The other important piece of evidence to which the Government do not want to listen is that competition actually drives down quality. When hospitals compete, they cut corners so that they can cut costs, and that increases the mortality rate. The fiercer the competition, the higher the mortality rate. Evidence of that has been established clearly in the United States, even when dealing with not-for-profit hospitals. I am not talking about profit driving down quality, but the fact that competition for patients results in a lowering of quality. That was reported in *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

Ironically, people were safer being treated in a small town where there was only one hospital than in a big city, where many hospitals were competing for patients, and therefore cutting costs and corners. Yet that is what the Government's proposals for opted-out hospitals competing with each other will mean. Standards will be driven down and mortality rates will rise. The internal market would also drive up administrative costs.

Mrs. Mahon: Before my hon. Friend comes on to competition, will she agree that the competition introduced through the tendering of services has been damaging to the quality of the Health Service? Most of us regularly see headlines about that in our local press. I have here an article describing how food inspectors have told a local authority to clean up and to improve hygiene standards in the hospital in which I worked for 11 years. It was a very clean hospital until it was forced to accept the in-house tender, which cut domestic services in half and reduced the standard of hygiene, leading to a dangerous situation.

Ms. Harman: My hon. Friend's example is a testimony to the Government's obsession to cut the cost of public services and never mind the quality.

When the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Select Committee on Social Services and was asked about the effect of the internal market on administrative costs, it was extraordinary that he could say that he had no idea of what the extra administrative costs would be. He was unable to give even the roughest estimate. When one considers that he is going headlong into proposals which, by all other estimates, will have considerable expenditure implications, it is extraordinary that he has no estimates or pilot scheme.

Resources will be diverted from patient care in a veritable paper chase of bills and billing procedures. Bills will go from hospital to hospital, from district health authority, to hospital, from GP to community service and from GP to one district health authority or another. That is what happens in the United States already and it is a pity that we cannot learn from the experience there, instead of simply recreating the mistakes. If one has a hospital appointment there for 9.30 am, one often has to turn up at 6 am to complete three hours of paper work before being admitted to hospital, so complicated has the system become. It is no wonder the American administrative costs are about 20 per cent., whereas ours in the Health Service are far lower.

I hoped that the Minister would deal with a number of important points of criticism raised outside the House and by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Owen). First, there is the question of patient choice. At present, a GP can refer patients either within the district or outside it, and within or outside the region. We have a genuinely national Health Service in that respect. If we look at the figures for cross-boundary flow, we can see that we do not need an internal market to free up the system and to enable patients to cross district boundaries. They already have the freedom and cross boundaries as a routine matter. The only impediments to that cross-boundary flow are spending restrictions, which have led some major hospitals to say that they will not treat out of district patients. That is a resource problem, not a problem of the system.

Therefore, the Government are making a completely bogus offer when they say that they are offering us a White Paper so that patients can travel across district boundaries, because GPs already have the opportunity to refer their

[Ms. Harman]

patients to wherever they and the patient think that the treatment is best and most convenient for that individual patient.

Although the right hon. Member for Devonport talked about what he regarded as the internal market, I did not see anything of the market in what he was saying. He said that we should have freedom of cross-boundary flows, which we already have, and activity-based budgeting. I do not see anything wrong with that, but there is nothing of the market in it.

Under the White Paper, the freedom of GPs, together with their patients, to make the choice about where the patient will be treated, will disappear. Instead, the decision will be made on a block basis at the beginning of the year by managers, by people who have no contact at all with patients, let alone with the individual patient who is seeking treatment. The decision will be made to place the contract and spend the money where the service is cheapest, not where it is most convenient for the individual patient, not where the service or the treatment is best, let alone where the individual patient chooses. The decision will be made not in response to individual patients as at present—the decision now rests with the GP and the patient—but on the basis of contract negotiations at the beginning of the year.

A major problem with that is that managers do not have accurate measurements of outcome and quality. All they have are accurate measurements of costs. Therefore, a powerful incentive is being put into the system for managers to negotiate contracts on block bookings for patients where the service is cheapest, rather than where the service is best. At this stage, medical audit does not help us, because the science of medical audit is still underdeveloped in terms of giving indications of outcome and quality.

At the moment, the people who know most about the quality of service in different hospitals and the effectiveness of the treatment and its outcome are the GPs who see their patients coming back from hospitals, and the hospital doctors who see the patients in hospital. However, they will not be consulted. They will not be the ones to make the decision on each individual patient. That decision will be made by means of a block booking by managers who know everything about cost, but nothing about quality and outcome.

That is why it is a travesty to continue to say that the White Paper will extend choice. Choice will be taken away from the patient and the GP and given to managers. It is true that in one respect more choice will be given—more choice will be give to the managers. It will be they who will benefit from more choice; it will certainly not be the GP or the patient.

The Minister said that GPs will not be forced to hold their own budgets. However, they will be forced to do so if that is the only way in which they can save referral rights for themselves and their patients. That is the stick to which the right hon. Member for Devonport rightly referred. The only way in which GPs can keep choice for themselves and their patients is if they opt to hold their own budgets.

However, when GPs do opt to hold their own budgets, they will be going out of the frying pan into the fire. Although they will have the choice of where to refer their patients, when they consult a patient, they must think not only about what the patient needs, but about what their practice's budget can afford. That is why GPs are, justifiably, so angry about the proposals and that is why the public are justifiably afraid.

Mr. Day: On what basis does the hon. Lady justify the implication that the budgets for such practices will be under-funded—because that is the implication of what she is saying?

Ms. Harman: At the moment, the proposals are that the region will decide on the budget for particular GPs. If the hon. Gentleman had read the working papers, as I have —I suspect from his question that he has not—he would have seen that they state that the region will not underwrite too high referral practices. It is clear that GP's budgets are part of an attempt—a blunt instrument —to hold down referral rates, not to make sure that referrals are appropriate when they are made and that when they are not made that, too, is an appropriate decision, because overall the Government want to see referral rates and spending on prescribing go down, irrespective of the effect on the quality of care and irrespective of the effect on the patient.

Having seen the effect that spending restrictions have had on hospitals, surely the effect that such restrictions would have on GPs is obvious to anybody. In the debate on the Health and Medicines Act 1988 it was clear that the Government wanted cash limits on GPs because they thought that GPs were spending too much money. Wherever one looks, the Government's true aims are self-evident.

The second point that I was disappointed that the Minister did not deal with was the question of the number of patients that each GP has. The trend, supported by successive Governments, has been to reduce the number of patients of each GP. There is good reason for that. The idea is to improve the quality of care; to be able to give each patient more time to make a better diagnosis; to discuss more deeply with their patients the treatment and effect; and to increase the opportunity for preventive work and screening. Increasing the capitation element of GPs' pay is a direct incentive for GPs to increase their number of patients. It is a direct disincentive and financial penalty for those GPs who want their patient list to reduce.

I turn now to the opting-out proposals. Again, the Minister tried to fudge this issue. Why does he not come clean and admit that it is the Secretary of State who will decide whether a hospital opts out? Indeed, it will not have been necessary for anybody at local level to have been interested in the proposals. A hospital can be selected by the region without consultation with anybody, and it can be offered up as a sacrifice to the Secretary of State. It is absolutely clear in the White Paper that the Secretary of State will decide and that the region will recommend. No account need be taken of the views of the community which depends on that hospital or those of the people who work in it.

The right hon. Member for Devonport was right in saying that, when a hospital opts out, it will become a self-interested institution. It will be dislocated from the community that it should be serving. It will not be possible to plan services when a whole load of competing institutions are all trying to keep their heads above water in a dog-eat-dog situation. That is the very opposite of the

integration of the services and the planning for future services which, hitherto, everybody agreed was so important.

The way in which the Government have gone about the process of trying to spur people into being in favour of opting out is disgraceful. There has been a mixture of threats and promises. To doctors who are desperately worried because of the years of under-funding, the Government have said, "If you're good boys and girls and if you're one of the first to opt out, we'll see you all right" —with a nudge and a wink. I advise those who are being cajoled in that fashion to be careful, because, although it might be part of the Government's plan to ensure that the first opters out survive and that they, the Government, have successful examples to hold before the public at the next general election, the Government do not plan to carry on like that. The Government will then cut those hospitals loose with their enormous debts of interest charges. Rather than a dash for freedom, opting out might end up as financial suicide.

The right hon. Member for Devonport said that it might be very nice for teaching hospitals to opt out. Well, it will not be very nice for teaching hospitals in London, because of the value of their sites and buildings. If, as the Government plan under the capital charges White Paper, St. Thomas's hospital had to pay interest charges on its sites, it would have to pay an extra £40 million a year. Guy's hospital, which is just a stone's throw down the river, would have to find an extra £27 million per year to service its huge interest charge. Therefore, those hospitals will have to compete for patients to bring in the resources to service their enormous capital debts. They will end up doing what the private sector does to make money—more and more cold surgery.

Therefore, the teaching base and the centre of excellence will be lost in a war of attrition between hospitals which are on sites of high value and are close together. At the end of the day, when one of them goes bust, the Government will say, "It's not our fault; it's the market. There must have been over-provision." I warn those in the teaching hospitals to be careful, because a trap is being laid. I believe that many of them understand that.

What the Government must explain most of all—what the Minister failed to mention—is the tax subsidy to commercial medicine. That is an extraordinary way to allocate public money. It is unfair, because it goes to only those who can afford private medical insurance or to those who can get someone else to take it out on their behalf. It will not go to those who have the greatest need. The point about private medical insurance is that it is about insurance and not about medicine. The insurance companies want to insure a healthy person who is unlikely to claim, not a sick person who is likely to claim.

Why should the Government subsidise private medicine? The Government appear to be in a lather of enthusiasm for private medicine, but they have no idea what is happening in the private sector. When I asked a series of questions about activity rates and bed occupancy in the private sector, the Government's answer was, "We haven't a clue." Therefore, my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) conducted a survey of the private sector, and we are grateful for its response.

The survey showed that the private sector has a lower bed occupancy and has higher administrative costs. It costs more to do operations and it is being increasingly taken over by the Americans. Why are the Government pushing us towards a system where the well-off will get treatment that they do not need, because it is profitable for doctors, but poor sick people will not get the treatment they need, because they will not be able to get insurance?

No one believes that the National Health Service is perfect. Of course we need more emphasis on community services, a better complaints procedure, a better system for compensating for mistakes and a reorientation of management and of those who work in hospitals towards the people who are using those hospitals. We need to develop the as yet primitive science of measuring and comparing the quality and outcome of the service, to further integrate acute and community services and primary services; and we need more resources to get the waiting lists down. No one is saying that the National Health Service is perfect, but what everyone is saying, apart from the Government, is that it is the best possible base on which to build.

The Government are trying to browbeat everyone by saying—the Minister denied this today—"Whatever you think, we shall go ahead with these plans, so you might as well shut up and learn to live with them." I do not believe that. Public and professional opposition remains enormously important. Because the plans are unjust as well as unworkable, the aim of everyone with any sense is to be part of a campaign to ensure that those plans remain plans and are never put into practice.

When will we receive the Government's response to the Griffiths report? It was rumoured before Easter that it would be soon after Easter. However, when giving evidence to the Select Committee, the Secretary of State said that he did not know when it will be. It appears to have drifted off the political horizon altogether. It is more than a year since Griffiths reported. There has been a huge increase in public spending on private care. It has increased by more than 8,000 per cent. since the Government came to power. Many people have grave reservations about the appropriateness of the sort of care and the standards of care that are being provided at public expense in the private sector. When will the Government get their act together and take hold of the situation? Or will they simply let the situation drift and leave thousands of frail, disabled and vulnerable people in the lurch, as is happening now?

5.53 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): A fool has infinite capacity for self-deception and a knave has infinite capacity for deceiving others. Far be it for me to accuse the British Medical Association of being either of those things, but I cannot understand why it has chosen to misinform, to mislead and to misquote the Government's review to its own members and to the country. The BMA's version of "Working for Patients"—I have read it carefully several times—is a travesty both of the Government's report and of the true situation. I shall not say what I think, but I shall say what is in the BMA's review and point out where it contrasts clearly with what is in the Government's plan. In several places the BMA's review speak as though underfunding is normal. If the facts are repeated often enough everyone will believe them. The BMA speaks of the underfunding of the Health Service—we have heard

[Dame Jill Knight]

that again today—when we are pouring money into the Health Service like Croesus, Midas and the IMF all rolled into one.

We heard again from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) that tired old fable that more money is being spent on the continent than is being spent here. If we do not add the amount of money that people are spending on their own health and are not receiving from the taxpayer at all, one can happily come up with an answer like that, but it is not an accurate answer.

In fact, our expenditure and our plans for putting more money into the Health Service are following a far steeper graph than anywhere else on the continent. We are doing much more for health care. I am proud to mention that, and even to boast about it. I know that Opposition Members hate hearing this, but when we came into office expenditure was £7,000 million per annum and it is now more than £26,000 million per annum. That is a large sum in anyone's language—except the BMA, which does not even notice it. Despite that immense increase, all that the BMA talks about is underfunding. I sometimes wonder whether the BMA would consider any sum worth mentioning as even adequate.

In paragraph 2.4 of the document the BMA goes even further. It keeps up its reputation for frightening old ladies by saying that the Government's main proposals in the White Paper are to

"reduce the level of public expenditure"

for health care. I was horrified to read such an accusation. I searched the Government White Paper from cover to cover, from back to front, upside down and inside out, and there is not one word to indicate any such thing. It is a lie. Does it even make sense?

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose*——

Dame Jill Knight: No, I shall not give way. I am trying not to be too long and I give notice that I shall not give way to anyone.

The BMA's version of "Working for Patients" says that doctors will run out of money to treat patients. That is utter nonsense. The BMA says that doctors will have to take on more patients than they can possibly cope with. That is absolute rubbish.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): It is true.

Dame Jill Knight: The hon. Gentleman might do the Government the courtesy of reading the White Paper, which says what the plans are. It is no use Opposition Members talking about what they would like it to say. They will have to read what it says. Conservative Members are not fools. Could anyone in his right mind imagine us doing anything to harm the National Health Service? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] I am glad to have had that extraordinary reaction from Opposition Members—it shows that they do not know anything.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No, the hon. Lady will not give way.

It would be sheer suicide for anyone in Government to destroy the Health Service. Apart from that, we care a great deal about it and, as our efforts have shown, we have repeatedly given more and more money to it. That is how we shall continue.

The paper published by the BMA speaks of the

"present uniform distribution of specialist services throughout the UK".

What "uniform distribution"? Where has the BMA been all this time? There is ample evidence of a wide variety of services up and down the country. Why does the BMA pretend otherwise? Why does it give us this rubbish about "present uniform distribution of specialist services"?

The Government are anxious to achieve such a uniform distribution of specialist services, which will be available to everyone. The Government are working towards that goal, not jettisoning it.

In paragraph 2.7 the BMA states:

"Extreme pressure is being put on health service managers, consultants and other hospital staff to seek self governing status for hospitals"

That is another lie. No pressure is being exerted on hospital managers or consultants. If the Government were exerting pressure, extreme or otherwise, why on earth would they include conditions? One cannot exert extreme pressure and then say, "but the conditions are this, that and the other." The White Paper makes it absolutely plain that there is no question of pressure being exerted. Hospitals will be able to choose what they want to do. If the Government intended to exert pressure, why does the White Paper say that hospitals must be interested in achieving self-government? One cannot have it both ways. The Government have made it plain that before any decision is made about self-government the option must be wanted by the particular hospital. That is not equivalent to forcing hospitals to adopt self-governing status.

There is no more pressure on hospitals to go independent than there is on general practitioners to become budget holders, as the BMA suggests. Recently a banner headline in a west midlands newspaper said proudly:

"Birmingham family doctors will refuse to carry out the Government's plans"

All along, the Government have made it perfectly clear that doctors are entirely free to decide whether they wish to become budget holders. The hon. Member for Peckham was wrong—there is no hidden pressure on doctors. That is not to say that their expenditure will not be monitored, and so it should be.

Some doctors prescribe 50 per cent. more drugs than others with exactly the same case load. Some doctors send 20 times more patients to hospital than others, again with the same case load. What is wrong with monitoring doctors and asking why a particular doctor sends so many more patients to hospital? I know of a young woman who was put on valium by her doctor and stayed on it for seven years without any medical examination at any time. She was simply given repeat prescriptions. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may not like what I am saying, but that is a ludicrous situation and it must be stopped. The Opposition clearly do not want to do anything about it. It is right to monitor the amounts of money spent by different doctors and the reasons for that expenditure. It would be thoroughly irresponsible of the Government not to try to get all practices to run as efficiently as the best ones. The best ones are extremely good, but I am appalled at what some of the bad ones do.

In this connection, I draw the attention of the House to a leaflet which has been distributed in Poole. A copy of it

was brought to the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward). Hon. Members should know that there is a skull and cross-bones at the top of the leaflet. I thought it had something to do with pirates, but dear me no—it is a health warning. It says:

"The Government is about to force dangerous changes on the National Health Service. They are going to put strong financial pressure on family doctors to give you fewer medicines, give you cheaper medicines, cut down on your hospital tests, cut down on your hospital treatment"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "That is true."] If the Opposition believe there is a scintilla of truth in that, they are out of their tiny minds. It continues:

"Dangerous illnesses will be discovered and treated too late. People will die."

That has been published by a profession which has already said that it will not agree to advertising. Yet it apparently agrees with handbills which contain lies being directed at sick, old and frightened people. That is monstrous, and it is all of a piece with the deplorable BMA document.

In one respect, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has brought trouble on his own head and contributed to the misunderstandings. I was astonished by accusations in the BMA paper that the Government are "rushing through" far-reaching and complicated reforms. The reforms are far-reaching and complicated, but they are not being rushed through. We all know that we shall not see a Bill until November or December at the earliest.

I have tracked down the source of some doctors' concern about this. In the first of the working papers the Government say that they intend to complete discussions by May. The whole thrust of the BMA's Luddite paper is to put the worst possible interpretation on the proposals and to suggest that the Government are rushing them through. That is not true, of course, but I wish that those words had not been used in the working paper as they suggest a lack of consultation.

Consultations are taking place. I know of no hon. Friend who is not having meetings every week with doctors or consultants in his constituency. We want to hear everything and we want to listen—that is what I call consultation. There is no question of rushing anyone as we have plenty of time. The BMA's interpretation of the proposals suggests to its members that the BMA's interpretations are fact. The words "might", "maybe", "possible" and "perhaps" are used right through the document—in one paragraph there were four "coulds" and a "might". It is infinitely better to have statements of fact than interpretations of the worst possible kind.

Another part of the BMA paper expresses concern that family practitioner committees

"might be filled by individuals with no experience of the primary health care services".

Why on earth would we be likely to appoint such people, especially as the paragraph directly opposite complains that the Government intend to appoint health authority members who

"reflect 'the strength of skills and experience' that the member could bring to the work of the health authority".

The BMA cannot have it both ways, but by golly it certainly tries.

I will take on a fair and honest political battle any day of the week. What I deplore about the BMA's misleading attitude and actions is that it knows perfectly well what the Government are driving at. It even acknowledges in some parts of the document that those objectives are absolutely right. The BMA forgets itself several times in the document and it says that the Government's objectives are right—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should be careful. They have obviously not noticed how much of the White Paper the BMA considers is a good idea. That is made plain in its document. That is in there, too.

The worst part of all this is that members of the BMA are obviously being encouraged to mislead and frighten their patients. Our reforms have nothing to do with privatising, starving or ending the Health Service; they are about strengthening, extending and financing——

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Private practice.

Dame Jill Knight: I do not give a damn about private practice. What I do give a damn about is that people outside this place should have the freedom to spend their money in the way that they wish. If they want to spend their money on health care, what has that to do with the hon. Gentleman? Why should he poke his nose into the way they choose to spend their money? What we are interested in is that there should be the best possible Health Service for sick people who need it, whether they can afford to pay for it or not—and it is because those are the aims of the Government that they will succeed, come what may from the Opposition.

6.10 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame Jill Knight), and I hope I can put her right on one or two things which are certainly not the case. Her interpretation of what the BMA says is not the same as mine.

This White Paper is not working in the interests of patients. Indeed, organisations working for the National Health Service have all told me that they are quite insulted by the title of the White Paper, in that it implies that they are not working for patients now. Nothing could be further from the truth, and many of these organisations have worked under a great deal of stress, thanks to Government policies over the last 10 years on the National Health Service.

This White Paper is not just another reorganisation; it is something quite different. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said it has turned out to be a monster, and that is absolutely true. She has been to America and studied in detail the system there, so she knows what the effect of the White Paper will be on the future of the National Health Service. It is about ending the National Health Service as we know it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Oh, yes it is. It does not address the real problems of the National Health Service: under-funding, waiting lists, and the disgraceful segregation of the elderly which has gone on over the last 10 years.

We have seen wholesale privatisation of the care of the elderly, something that hon. Members opposite should be deeply ashamed of. The White Paper does not address the lack of care for the mentally ill and mentally handicapped. In fact, the disgusting emphasis of the White Paper is on competition, markets, buying, selling, incentives and assets —dehumanising terms when talking about care, but certainly reflecting the Government's values.

What is missing from the White Paper is any notion of the National Health Service as we would like to see it, as it once was, and as it was envisaged by its founders: care and compassion, the alleviation of pain, and an end to

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

suffering, regardless of the ability to pay. Most of it is focused on ending the basic character of the National Health Service. It is an extremely obvious prelude to full privatisation after 1992, and we on the Opposition Benches are not fooled at all; should a Conservative Government be elected then, that is what we will get.

Looking at the detail of the White Paper, I am shocked by the absence of local control and planning, because the district health authorities will essentially disappear. Paragraph 3.20 of the White Paper virtually announces the end of district health authorities. As the acute hospitals become self-governing, we are told that it will be the responsibility of those placing contracts to monitor their performance in providing agreed services. That is absolute nonsense, because the reality is that most district health authorities will possibly go, and where one remains in existence, it will be seriously weakened, and no monitoring of any authority is built into the White Paper.

I have read all the discussion documents, and it is only the training of junior doctors which will be monitored by the royal colleges. There is talk of questionnaires and follow-up surveys, but it is misleading to talk about monitoring by health authorities, because they will be either extinct or seriously weakened.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham said, the capital arrangements are quite dangerous for some hospitals which might be tempted to opt out. The claim in the Prime Minister's introduction that the National Health Service will be financed mainly by general taxation looks like a very flexible and unreliable commitment. The delegation of operational money and increasingly large capital schemes to trust hospitals will encourage opting out, despite the Minister saying it is not true. There really is an arm-twisting operation going on, with lots of carrots being dangled; offers of a great share of the new market in hips and hernias and the like are being made.

I put it to the Minister that these trusts may be called the National Health Service but that that will soon become meaningless; despite what the hon. Member for Edgbaston said in her passionate address, hospital services will be subject to jungle law, because the hospitals which compete less successfully will slowly but surely lose patients, funds, reputations and staff, and communities will lose their hospitals.

One cannot have a free-standing accident and emergency department. I asked the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health for an assurance that Calderdale area health authority will not lose its accident and emergency service, and I received wriggling and sleight-of-hand answers, which is the technique this Government use when they do not want to be frank. But, reading those answers, it is clear that there is no guarantee that Calderdale will retain its accident and emergency service and the health authority or hospital trust may have to buy that service from Bradford or Burnley, thus putting life and limb at risk.

We may have thought that the arrangements under which schools and housing might be permitted to opt out were bizarre and undemocratic, but if we consider paragraph 3.15 in the original document, which mentions that a group of staff or people from the local community might initiate the process or respond to any initiative taken by the Secretary of State to form a hospital trust, we realise what a sham any democratic consultation about these hospitals is. Paragraph 3.19, which talks about adequate publicity for trust formation, really does not comply with any notion of consultation as we all understood it.

My district health authority is under the direction of a politically appointed chairman, a Government lackey, who does the bidding of the Government on every instruction to cut and has done for years, and a district manager, a redundant manager from British Steel, who was thrust upon us and has proved an unmitigated disaster for our local health services. Any of these people can say to the Secretary of State, "We want to opt out," and the Secretary of State himself, as I understand it, can say, "I believe you should opt out." There is absolutely no sense of fairness or democracy in that at all.

This is not their Health Service. What right has a redundant steel manager, who now manages our local health service—very badly, in my opinion—to say that he will move us on the road to privatisation? He has no right. I worked for the Health Service for 13 years and I have more right than he to take decisions about our local services. I at least put my blood, sweat and toil into the Health Service. I cared very much for it. The bizarre and quite undemocratic notion of opting out will meet great opposition. The public will perceive it as so unfair that it will be a non-starter.

The hon. Member for Edgbaston referred to the BMA and what she thought were its unfair objections to the White Paper. As a member of the National Union of Public Employees, I worked actively for the benefit of staff in the National Health Service for many years. I was also an auxiliary nurse in the NHS. I did not often find myself on the same side as the BMA. Mostly the BMA is on the Government's side, not on the side of the rest of us in political terms. However, there is nothing iffy about the objections voiced by the BMA in Halifax to the White Paper:

"A large proportion of patients will not be able to travel to hospitals outside their locality. Many patients and their relatives cannot afford to pay for fares involved; they will certainly find it highly inconvenient.

For hospitals to provide a competitive 'quote' for any service, corners will be cut, for example, skimping on investigations or reducing in-patient times increasing the likelihood of problems for the patient."

If a patient has been investigated at one hospital, but the treatment is cheaper at another hospital, will the patient need to be transferred?

Many questions are raised about patient care. With regard to general practitioner services the Halifax division of the BMA states:

"Concern was expressed that no pilot-study had been carried out, or is proposed, to see if the GP budget-holding is feasible."

It continues:

"Reduction of the basic practice allowance is likely to cause fewer vacancies for women doctors, who commonly work less than full-time while they have a young family.

The proposed budget-holding GPs will have no incentive to screen patients as any pathology found might cost some of his/her budget. Patients on expensive treatments might find doctors reluctant to accept them because of the financial implications.

GP budget-holders will have difficulty controlling their budget because of the open-ended nature of GP services. GPs cannot refuse service to patients on financial grounds."

There are many more specific objections from the BMA.

The idea that GPs require a different structure to provide them with incentives to practise better medicine is abhorrent and insulting. The emphasis of the White Paper is clearly on finance instead of patient care.

Cash-limiting primary health care will be hugely disadvantageous to the people who really need help—the old and the chronically sick. Far from criticising the BMA, GPs, nurses, hospital workers, consultants and all the other decent organisations which have put patient care first and objected to the proposals, the Opposition applaud those people roundly and soundly.

The National Health Service is suffering from starvation caused by under-funding. If Conservative Members were not blind, they would see the headlines in the press about this. On 13 April, I read a headline which stated:

"Patients are dying because Calderdale does not have its own specialist heart unit."

The report continued:

"the inevitable delays mean that many die, according to a report by Bradford Cardiologists."

The report states that roughly 11 per cent. of people waiting for an operation die.

If the Government were really serious about doing something about the Health Service, they should address that obscenity. They should not be trying to restructure something which does not require restructuring. The White Paper has little if anything to do with organisation or restructuring. The Health Service has been kept going, while the Government have been bleeding it to death, by the motivation of individuals and the dedication of those who work for it.

The Guardian said that the White Paper has met

"a wall of professional opposition"

which begins

"to look more impregnable day by day."

I believe that the opposition will grow. This is just the start. I welcome the debate and I believe that the White Paper will be defeated because it is about ending the National Health Service. The public have rumbled that.

6.25 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): This is a very sad day for what remains of the Social Democratic party. In its very short history it has had many sad days, but I believe that the contribution from the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) who sadly cannot be with us any longer, marked the nadir of that party's troubled life. Possibly that has something to do with the right hon. Gentleman's personal history. However, it is particularly sad because when that party was formed many Conservative Members, without any temptation to join it, welcomed it because it might offer an alternative to the tired Socialism and faded Marxism of today's Labour party. We hoped that it would offer open minds and new ideas. However, today we heard a speech from one of the most closed minds on this issue. The speech was totally lacking in new ideas.

The right hon. Member for Devonport suffers from what across the Channel might be called a professional deformation. That is to say, as a professional medical man, he shares the short-sightedness which sadly seems to afflict so many professional medical people in this country. They seem to be wilfully ignorant of the standards and what is being achieved in other parts of the world. They are totally cocooned and complacent about what the National Health Service can or should offer. When they look overseas, they choose only the worst of the American experience, and ignore the very impressive best. They also ignore the enormous gaps growing in many areas between the standards on the continent and the standards which we can offer here now, with the great impact of the resources which the Government have invested in health care over the past 10 years.

The hon. Member for Devonport also suffers from a personal sense of guilt. He attacked fiercely the fact that we now spend—I believe he said "only"—6 per cent. of our national GDP on health. He seemed very anxious to forget the fact that when he was a Minister with responsibility for health, we spent 4·8 per cent. of a very much smaller GDP. That takes a lot of living down for someone who had any responsibility for the Health Service.

The right hon. Member for Devonport also made great play about the present flurry from the medical profession, including the royal colleges. Although he admitted that such flurries had happened before, he suggested that they were happening now at absolutely unprecedented level. A short time ago, the presidents of the royal colleges and the deans of the medical faculties issued a statement which said:

"The ills within the NHS are serious and by threatening standards threaten the health and well-being of the community. There is a real danger of standards deteriorating to a point from which recovery will be impossible within a foreseeable term."

That statement was issued by the presidents of the royal colleges and the deans of the faculties in October 1974, when the right hon. Member for Devonport was a Minister responsible for health. Therefore, he should understand that this is not a new problem. It is a problem that has been developing. Indeed, it has been developing during the past 10 years, despite the resources that we have provided. I will not rehearse our record yet again, but it is a proud record—a record of commitment to a comprehensive, universal Health Service.

But, clearly, more and more funding is not enough. On the Jimmy Young show about 12 months ago, the hon. Lady said:

"We need perhaps another £200 million, and then the problems of the health service will all be over."

Since the hon. Lady said that, we have produced billion after billion after billion, and, of course, we still have the problems. We know why. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Deparment of Health enumerated the problems: the aging of the population, technical innovations and their resource implications, and rising expectations and aspirations.

These are serious problems that have to be dealt with seriously, but they are not being dealt with at all by members of the Opposition parties. Those Members are applying closed minds, totally ignoring what we have done and the fact that, in addition to more funds, which are coming forward thanks to the strength of the economy, we need structural and organisational changes. It is monstrous that, after 40 years, including the period when the right hon. Member for Devonport had some say in these matters, the sensitivity for resource management in the National Health Service should be virtually non-existent.

Happily, in recent years, we have had the resource management initiatives, the Korner report, and one or two other things, but we have a long way to go. But we cannot go that way unless mechanisms are put in place, and that is precisely what the reforms now proposed are intended to

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

do. The suggestion that this involves the break-up of the National Health Service is nonsense. What it involves is doctors, nurses and others concerned taking a much more concrete interest themselves in the disposal of the available resources.

The right hon. Gentleman did at least have the grace to recognise that resources are finite. I will not say that demand is infinite, but certainly it can never seriously be contained. It is much more sensible that judgments about the allocation of resources should be made not at the level of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury or the Secretary of State for Health, but, to the best possible extent, in the surgery by the general practitioner, by the professional who knows. It is the professional who has the greatest insight, the best judgment and the most experience. Likewise, he must be much better equipped to judge which hospital his patient should go to. This is the essence of the proposals, which will bring great benefits to the consumer —and I do insist that we are consumers and customers, not just patients.

One of the unfortunate features of the Health Service, great though it is in many respects, is that in too many areas patients are pushed around. They have to wait here and wait there. This is the wrong atmosphere. Consumerism is growing and developing in so many other areas of life. Indeed, the Social Democratic party would consider that it is in the van of consumerism—but not in respect of the sacred cow of health, because it lacks the political courage to tackle the problems, as, of course, do all the other parties opposite.

I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench not to be discouraged by the extraordinary performance of the British Medical Association. They should take comfort from the fact that there are many historical precedents. Every time a Government in this country have sought to improve the National Health care system, they have been opposed by the medical professions and their organised bodies. Those people opposed Lloyd George's National Insurance Act 1911, until they discovered two years later that it benefited them. They were the only people who opposed the coalition White Paper put forward by Henry Willink, the Conservative Minister of Health in 1944. We all know that their opposition to the Aneurin Bevan proposals were silenced only when, as we have been reminded, their mouths were stuffed with gold. Most of us in this House remember their ferocious opposition to the 1984 selected list, which we all now know is a great success. In all those cases, after fierce opposition for a year or two, the medical profession came round. I hope that it will not take so long this time.

6.34 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome this debate, and I welcome the opportunity to speak specifically to one aspect of it, in my role as the Member of Parliament representing Guy's hospital, which is thought to be the hospital with the strongest desire to become a self-governing hospital trust. It may interest the House to know that, when it comes to a vote tonight, there is not one thing in the motion as tabled by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) with which my hon. and right hon. Friends and I do not agree. We shall therefore vote with the SDP and, as I understand it, the Labour party, at the end of this debate.

We shall be voting with the other Opposition parties because the people represented in those parties are the successors to those who supported the idea of the Health Service both in concept and in legislation, in the 1940s, when the Tories opposed it. We believe that the Tories' commitment then, which was noticeable by its absence, to the provision of a free Health Service—free at the point of delivery for all, without distinction—is matched by their lack of commitment now.

I would point out to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) that the evidence for that is that there is not equal choice for all. This year, her Government have introduced tax incentives for people, if they are of pensionable age, to go to the private sector. Her Government have always allowed the private sector to benefit from training that is paid for out of the public purse. The reality is that, over and over again, it is the Tory Government who push towards the private sector people who would—given a fair choice—far rather remain in the public sector.

Dame Jill Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Not at the moment. If I have a moment later, I may give way.

Many of the people who may be contemplating going into self-governing hospitals as consultants are doing so not because they support the idea, but only, as the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said, because they believe that if they jump quickly, if they jump first, the Government will make sure that they are protected, whatever happens to the rest. They are doing so not out of conviction but out of concern for their self-preservation. That is a cynical—understandable, but cynical—way of justifying any argument that they support the Government's proposals.

It is not right to say, as the hon. Lady argued, that the Government are not encouraging people to move in the direction of being independent within the Health Service. The working paper on self-governing hospitals says:

"The Government believes that self-governing hospitals will have a major role to play in improving services to patients. It will therefore encourage as many hospitals as are willing and able to do so to seek self-governing status as NHS hospital trusts. The Government aims to establish a substantial number of trusts with effect from April 1991."

There is no doubt that the Government will encourage, push and contrive to make sure that, if possible, there are at least some flagships sailing into the new sea of the private Health Service after the next election. Whether they succeed is yet to be determined.

I accept the argument of the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) that in this sort of debate it is not necessarily best to pray in aid those who traditionally have been difficult to please when reform has been mooted for them and their profession. The BMA has argued against reforms in the past. Inevitably, it sees things from its professional point of view. I do not think that its members are necessarily the best people to cite as advocates for a case that one seeks to argue here. One has to argue from principle and from the point of view of the public at large.

I must tell those hon. Members who believe that the users of the Health Service will not represent the greatest patient difficulty that the enormous majority of them are strongly opposed to the Government's plans. They believe

not that there is just a scintilla of truth in leaflets such as that which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) cited as coming from Poole, but that there is a flotilla of truth in the allegations and assertions made in such documents. They believe that the Health Service is not safe in the Government's hands.

Mr. Day *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way in a moment if I have time.

Those who usually look to Guy's hospital as their local district hospital have specific reasons for concern. Many aspects of the White Paper are worrying, but those which worry people in south-east London most are those which are likely to change the nature of Guy's hospital and its quality of care. Guy's is at the forefront of those reported to be interested in becoming a self-governing hospital trust. However, many at Guy's, from the most senior to the most junior, are resolutely opposed to opting out. Many have written expressing their views. Even those who have said that they support the idea, among whom are some on the management board, have many crucial questions about self-governing yet to be answered by the Government. The Government have not yet convinced Guy's—far from it.

Just like the other five hospitals which are part of the resource management initiative, all of which have opposed the ideas in the White Paper, Guy's hospital has also not come out in support because it is not yet satisfied that its specific questions and concerns have been answered, some of which have even been put forward by advocates of the White Paper, one of whom was an adviser to the Prime Minister on these matters.

There is no guarantee that the introduction of market forces as proposed will in anyway improve care. On the contrary, there is evidence that unprofitable patients will become unpopular patients. In my area, where more than 25 per cent. of the community are pensioners, the probability is that in the long term Guy's will not be able to look after them and they will have to go much further away.

An increasing number of constituents in an inner city are likely to be elderly. On my last visit to Guy's I asked what would happen when they are admitted and could not be returned to their homes after an operation or treatment because they could not cope on their own. I was shown a graph of the profits to be made from the hospitalisation of an old person. After the initial operation or intensive care, profits begin to tail away to little or nothing. In order to prevent an old person blocking a bed, the hospital might, after about 10 days, have to impose a surcharge on the district for keeping the district's elderly, non-earning patients in hospital. The district would not have catered for that surcharge because it would have gone to Guy's because it offered the cheapest contract available. Therefore, the district will not be able to keep in hospital an elderly patient who has had an operation, but will have to move the patient out or look for somewhere else for that patient to go.

It is right that hospital beds intended for acute purposes should not necessarily be used for long-term convalescence, but in a place such as north Southwark there is nowhere else to go for long-term convalescence. We do not have nursing homes or long-term geriatric care facilities. If the last refuge, a bed in the local district general hospital, which also happens to be a regional national specialty, disappears, the Government will be saying to the elderly in a community such as that in south London and Southwark, "You must leave your community because we cannot pay for you here."

There is no profitable solution to the care of old people; there are only caring solutions or uncaring solutions. With the district health authority forced to enter contracts on the basis of what will be the most economical, there is no hope of the less profitable services being expanded. The only answer will be out-of-town homes where residents will be far away from friends and families, inaccessible to visitors, isolated and alone. Commercialisation always has losers and the losers are always the weakest and most vulunerable in our community.

But care of the elderly will not be the only area to suffer. Centralisation will be inevitable as one hospital becomes known for a certain specialty. District health authorities will be powerless to prevent the services that they want to purchase being discontinued at one hospital and will be forced to go elsewhere. It is a twisted sort of logic to think that choice can be widened simply by a provider becoming a purchaser.

Anyone who has visited their corner shop knows that it does not work by providing everything because market forces do not allow it to do so. The convenience of the consumer does not mean that every shop has every product for sale. It will be the patient who has to travel away from his or her home and who will not receive continuity of care from the same general practitioner and consultant who will suffer yet again. Patients may have to go to Walsall for eyes, Maidstone for hearts and Southampton for backs because of the contract that the district has entered into. Many doubts still centre on whether it will be profitable for a local hospital to give a comprehensive service. The reality is that it will not be, and comprehensive local care in one's local hospital will be a thing of the past.

What effects will the White Paper have on teaching? For Guy's to survive as a teaching hospital there needs to be a wide range of medical activity. What will happen if Guy's loses its core contract with the local health authority of Lewisham and north Southwark? In any year, market forces may determine that the contract goes somewhere else—to St. Thomas's, King's, Bart's, the London or elsewhere. Commercialisation will not provide the stable basis that is needed to give students a five or six-year medical degree course. What will happen to the future provision of skilled doctors if medical schools are struggling to provide adequate training in an uncertain environment? And will they spend a lot of money on training—an expensive commitment—which they will not easily be able to recoup?

Commercialisation means the end of a balanced service in other ways too. The good consultants will be bought by the hospitals that can afford them and other hospitals will become second class with second class staff. The test in the White Paper is what is cost-efficient, not what is best for care.

The White Paper speaks of consultants becoming more efficient managers. Nowhere does it speak of managers becoming more caring health providers. Everywhere profit will be the governing factor. The providers, the general practitioners and the health authorities, will not be able to rely on a consistently secure provision of services. The hospitals will not be able to rely on a consistently secure flow of patients. The patients will not be able to rely on

[Mr. Hughes]

consistently secure provision of care. The Opposition are right to be deeply cynical in their belief that the Government are intent on replacing care with profit as the motivating factor in the Health Service. I hope that Conservative Members will join us in voting for the motion tonight.

6.48 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (Norfolk, South-West): It is noticeable that the debate has been distinguished yet again by the continued inability of Opposition Members to give the Government credit for the record amounts now being spent on the Health Service. The nurses had an enormous pay award of almost £1 billion during the year, with an extra £2 billion being spent in the current financial year and an extra £2·5 billion planned for next year. The Government should give themselves credit for that extra spending and for the fact that our attention is now directed at the way in which those enormous sums of money are to be spent. I am sorry to note that Opposition Members apparently have no notion of the inequalities in the levels of provision across the country which the White Paper seeks to put right.

I mention in particular the new arrangement for the resource allocation working party. The abolition of RAWP will be welcomed in many rural areas with a high population growth, and especially in East Anglia, where the chairman of the regional health authority has said that that single measure will help East Anglian patients more than anything else in the shorter term. We hope that that wil be implemented rapidly.

The White Paper also seeks to remedy the poor quality of information about costings and quality of care within the Health Service, a matter frequently highlighted by the Select Committee. That too will be greatly welcomed by all the professionals working in the Health Service as a way of measuring the quality and evenness of care across the country.

In rural areas, patients are not always satisfied with the standard of service that they get from their general practitioners. Financial incentives will be given to general practitioners on a new basis for rural populations, for caring for elderly people amd for caring for children under five. Those and a great number of other incentives will do a great deal to bring the standard of service enjoyed by rural patients up to the best standard provided by GPs for their urban counterparts.

It may be of interest to Opposition Members to note that rural patients can perceive advantages in some of the provisions of the White Paper. If the new contract and the provisions of the White Paper can do anything to improve the attitude towards patients of a general practitioner who says that he does not need an appointments system because village people like talking to one another all morning, it will certainly have been worth while.

6.51 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): The debate has been set against a necessary Government review of the Health Service. The SDP has always welcomed the review. We were looking for a radical and imaginative overhaul of a system that has served us well for the last 40 years and that we want to serve us well for the next 40 years. We share many of the Government's objectives—at least the ones to which they pay lip service. We welcome an increase in patient choice, better rights for patients and a more consumer-related service. The SDP has long been committed to the internal market, but not necessarily the internal market that we see in the White Paper. We also welcome a better quality of service across the board, and structural and organisational changes.

The White Paper sets the wrong agenda. There is nothing on funding. In spite of the many protestations from the Government Benches, without proper funding for the Health Service, no amount of juggling or reorganisation will make it work. The Health Service is under-funded compared with our comparable European competitors. It has to receive a substantial influx of funds to make any subsequent reorganisation and restructuring work.

Also incorporated in the White Paper and in some of the Government's recent thinking is an erosion of the basic principles of free service at the point of use, funded entirely out of direct taxation. There are major gaps in what we have seen so far. There is no acknowledgment of the growing need of the elderly and no proposal to take account of how a Health Service that is already straining under pressure can cope with the increasing number of elderly in our midst.

One of the things that troubles me most about the review is the speed with which it is being implemented. Again, we have heard from the Government Benches that it is a leisurely process. I could not disagree more. We are looking at a radical review which is demanding new skills, new structures and new procedures. There are dangers in what will happen. We have heard the words "might", "may" and "possibly"—the changes might or may possibly have disastrous effects on the Health Service. One way to make sure that they do not is to pilot schemes and see how they work. The Government should proceed slowly, cautiously and carefully on the basis of proper information.

I have a document from a leading city management consultant which addresses some of the problems. It deals with what regional health authorities, district health authorities and general practitioners will have to do. It is an extensive list. Due to lack of time, I shall read only a few of the items that it lists in relation to district health authorities:

"establishing the likelihood of hospitals becoming self-governing;

specifying the volume and standards of service which will be required to meet local health needs;

setting up and evaluating contracts for both 'core' and other services;

establishing tight contractual arrangements within minimum and maximum service levels for the full range of services required by the DHA's population;

establishing financial management systems which monitor contract expenditure and activity;

establishing mechanisms by which quality of contract performance is monitored, and ensuring all providers have comprehensive quality assurance and medical audit programmes".

The list goes on and on. It is a complex list of serious things that need to be done properly in order to get the service right.

We have before us not only an impossible time scale but a programme that is being implemented without proper consultation and without the good will and support of the

innumerable tiers of staff who have to carry out the procedure. The White Paper has provoked at best quiet resentment and at worst open hostility.

Severe and major strategic changes, which should be implemented sequentiously, are proposed. We should ensure that the cost and quality information is available well in advance of the procedure starting. There is no point in saying that we will go ahead on the basis of incomplete or incompetent information and, if we get it wrong, so be it. We are dealing with people's lives and with a Health Service that has been built up over the years. I agree with some Government Back Benchers that the current debate is taking place against a background of many successes that have often been overlooked while we focused on the failures.

The time scale for the review should be five to 10 years. We should move slowly and surely to get it right. There is a need to develop business plans and to acquire and use marketing and contractual skills. There is also a need for capital accounting. The whole procedure will need new skills. For all that to be done within two and half years is nothing more than a joke.

I support the resource management initiative, clinical audit and the use of information technology, but the way it is all being picked out of a hat and offered to the Health Service as a panacea for all evils makes the whole process unrealistic when the people, the resources and the structures are not there. Information technologists are an expensive breed. Many hon. Members will have spoken to hospital technicians who can all double or even treble their salaries overnight outside the Health Service. This scheme will rely on those self-same experts being in the Health Service, with no extra resources to pay for them. It just cannot work.

I prefer to speak in terms of patients' rights when considering the internal market. The SDP's version of the internal market was triggered by patients. It was based on offering patients a choice of a faster service in another hospital or in another health authority. But it would be up to them to make the choice. Because it was a choice, it was a carrot rather than a stick. It was not a cheap option, it was not punitive and it was not a cost-cutting exercise. The review will have disastrous consequences for the NHS.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 77, Noes 230.

Division No. 161] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbett, Robin
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wilson, Brian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Rosie Barnes and
Mr. John Cartwright.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey

Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Michael Fallon.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 85.

Division No. 162] **[7.13 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony

Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Michael Fallon.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Fyfe, Maria
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House expresses full support for the proposals set out in the White Paper "Working for Patients" and believes that these will lead to a Health Service that is more responsive to the needs of patients, and will enable those hospitals which best meet the needs of patients to get the money to do so, will reduce waiting times, improve the quality of care, help family doctors to develop the services they provide for their patients, improve the effectiveness of National Health Service management, and ensure that all those concerned with delivering health care make the best use of the resources available to them.

Birmingham City Council (No. 2) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise for intervening on a point of order so early in the debate, but I would like you to clarify a ruling, if possible. Under the Standing Orders of the House, would it be appropriate for any Member speaking in the debate who has enjoyed free tickets and free hospitality at the annual super prix to declare that? That is a common practice and any interest on the part of those speaking for and against the proposals tonight should be placed on record.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): That is a matter for individual Members, but I am sure that those who have an interest to declare will make it clear to the House in the normal way.

Before we begin the debate, I refer the House to the fact that Mr. Speaker has selected the instruction, which may be referred to on Second Reading.

7.26 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In deference to the request of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), my family and I have been frequent attenders of the super prix. Indeed, I was a competitor at the first super prix event and, until last year, I could say with some honesty that I was the fastest Birmingham resident to travel the streets of that city. In the first race, I exceeded 100 mph. This year I have been superseded by another Birmingham resident who went a great deal faster than that in a race. I hope that I have satisfied the hon. Member for Perry Barr that I have experienced the super prix, and am delighted to have done so.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the expenditure on free tickets and hospitality at the road race is large and a matter of controversy. Will he estimate the quantity and value of the free hospitality and tickets provided to him and his family?

Mr. Roger King: I cannot exactly recall the price of the tickets, so I cannot provide that information. Children under 14 are not charged anyway, and the number of nibbles that they had in the so-called hospitality tent was very modest. So were my own tastes, I may add: as I recall, I was actually locked out of the tent one year because it was too crowded.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Can my hon. Friend confirm to one who also enjoyed that hospitality that there were more members of the Labour party than Conservatives in the tent, and that more had free tickets?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point. As I remember, at the first event we were graced, if that is the right expression, by none other than Mr. Derek Hatton, who had come to see how Birmingham got on with running such an event. I do not know whether it had any effect on what he has been doing since then. The event attracted considerable civic attendance from further afield, and I was aware of the presence of a large number of Labour councillors and others enjoying the limited hospitality that was available.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: I am only two lines into my speech, but yes, I will.

Mr. Howell: I hope that the debate develops on a rather higher plane. But in answer to a question that Opposition Members are asking—whether Mr. Denis Thatcher tended to receive such hospitality—he attended as a director of Halfords, the main sponsor of the event, and put a considerable amount of money into it. I hope that we shall hear no more of such pettiness.

Mr. King: I quite agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I think that we should now move on to discuss the main elements of the Bill.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley) *rose*——

Mr. King: I shall give way, but I hope that this will be the last intervention.

Mr. Pike: As a Member with no direct involvement, who wants to find out whether the Bill is in the interests of Birmingham and its residents, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be somewhat concerned that Halfords has written to all Members with Halfords superstores in their constituencies urging them to support the Bill. Does he think that the Bill is more important to Halfords than to the people of Birmingham?

Mr. King: That is another interesting point. The element of sponsorship has been one of the major assets of the super prix, which attracts more sponsorship than any other motor race in the United Kingdom except the formula 1 grand prix meeting at Silverstone. As a result of paying large sums in sponsorship, Halfords benefits considerably from media coverage of the super prix, and I think that it is entitled to put its view across.

With its superstore concept the company has expanded dramatically, bringing thousands of badly needed jobs to inner-city areas, redeveloping rundown areas into new and attractive one-stop shopping for the motorist and providing car servicing at an economic price. I think that Halfords has something worth shouting about, and that it is entitled to write to Members saying how important the super prix is in highlighting its services and products.

How fitting it is that, on the day on which Toyota has announced its massive £700 million investment in the midlands, we should debate a subject that centres on the motor car. While to some motor racing is a rich man's pastime, to the motor industry it is still a focal point of engineering activity and a window to the world for our national prowess in automotive technology. What better place to celebrate that expertise than the centre of our country, in the streets of Birmingham—a city that still depends so much on the motor car and its future?

Having gone through difficulties in the recent past, our motor industry is now stronger than it has been for many years, providing good-quality products—not just cars and other commercial vehicles, but components. Racegoers will see very few foreign-built single-seater racing cars on our world tracks. No French, German, Italian or even Japanese cars are entirely built by those countries. It is Britain chassis design and engine technology that so often lead the way in motor racing.

It is worth pointing out that at Indianapolis, where one of the oldest motor races in the world takes place, the vast

majority of cars that come to the start grid are British-designed and British-built. I do not think that we shout loud enough about that. *[Interruption.]* I said that most cars to be seen in a race were British. Toyota uses a British chassis, British engineering, British road-holding equipment and British components. The engine at the back is a Toyota unit, yes, but British engineers have tuned it up. In the type of motor racing that takes place in Birmingham—the super prix and international formula 3000 racing—we are pre-eminent in providing the competitive products that teams from throughout the world use during a season.

The background to the Birmingham super prix is well documented. We had a Second Reading debate about it on 1 April 1985, and it was admirably promoted by Sir Reginald Eyre, whom the House now misses. He delivered a cogent, sensible and enthusiastic speech on why Birmingham should capitalise on the opportunities to stage a motor race in its city environment. He could only do so, however, because the local authority had decided, by a significant majority, to promote a Bill to allow that motor race to be held. The Bill enjoyed all-party support. Strangely, a Labour administration on the city council was keenest to promote a motor race in the city.

This Bill has also received substantial support from the city council: 75 members were in favour of it, and of the 16 who were not, six abstained. It can be said, I think, that the Bill comes to the House from the people of Birmingham, whose elected representatives have debated at great length whether to seek a further Bill to allow us to run the motor race that we want.

Mr. Rooker: May I make a small point? Birmingham city council has 117 members. Where were the other 20? What list are they on?

Mr. King: I am only quoting the figures that I have here. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will be able to guide me. I suppose that those people, for one reason or another, were not present to cast their vote. The number 20 rings a slight bell: I recall that there is a militant section within the ruling party in the town hall with a name similar to "the Grosvenor group", whose members do not agree with anything that the council is doing. They are now contesting the leadership. Because their attitude is always derogatory and they are always seeking to disrupt their own party, presumably they stayed away that day.

I think that we would all agree, however, that the fact that a Member is not in the House of Commons to cast his vote does not imply that he is either for or against the motion. We always decide questions on the basis of the votes of Members who vote when the opportunity is there. Nevertheless, it is not all that difficult to go to the town hall to cast a vote, and I see no reason why those people should not have gone. I can only imagine that their absenteeism —if that is what it was—meant that they did not feel able to support the measure.

Ms. Short: The group that the hon. Gentleman has just misdescribed came together over the issue of whether Martineau house, a home providing holidays for disabled children in our city, should be closed. Will the hon. Gentleman give us his view on whether the home should have been closed?

Mr. King: I shall not be led up that road. The Conservative view was that that house should not have been closed. The hon. Lady's point is utterly irrelevant to the debate. I have no intention of being steered away from the main topic of the debate, the super prix.

In1985, Birmingham city council was given the power to run motor racing through the city centre. The intentions of the city council were stated in the preamble to the Birmingham City Council Act 1985, which states:

"The city is a major commercial and industrial centre and with a view to promoting the city, encouraging tourism and attracting business it is expedient that the council is authorised to provide or arrange for the provision of motor races on certain streets in the city".

That preamble places the motor race, which became known as the Birmingham super prix, within an overall economic development strategy.

The recession in the 1970s and early 1980s which severely affected Birmingham's traditional manufacturing base and resulted in record levels of unemployment, focused attention on the need for the city to diversify into service-sector employment. The tremendous success of the national exhibition centre in attracting new wealth and new employment led the way. The economic benefit of visitors and their spending power in leisure and business tourism was recognised as a significant vehicle for creating labour-intensive industry in hotels, leisure and associated trades.

Hon. Members from all sides of the House will probably pay tribute to the way in which the city has revitalised Birmingham, which in the past few years has developed from an area of despondency and decline which some felt was irreversible. Thanks to the determination of all its elected representatives and the people of Birmingham, the city has proved that it can find a new path to prosperity and new opportunities by concentrating and targeting on new avenues of commercial enterprise, not on the bedrock of manufacturing but on a new tourist centre.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the House should welcome the proposal by the Labour administration in Birmingham to produce the Bill, because it benefits not only the motor industry but the entire west midlands? I represent Dudley, and many components are manufactured in my constituency. The components industry is dependent on the promotion of the motor car and the motor industry. Does he agree that that is an important factor?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend is quite correct, but the impact of the motor race has far wider implications than the immediate environment of our constituencies and affects the whole region. When such an event is promoted by the media and on television, the region benefits. A great city such as Birmingham, with nearly 1 million people, can embark on promotions on a scale which places such as Dudley would have to contemplate extremely carefully. Dudley does not have the the facilities or the ability to promote such an event; nevertheless, Dudley will gain from Birmingham being the vital, throbbing heart of the region's strong economic activity.

A series of ambitious and imaginative schemes were devised by the city council to stimulate leisure and business tourism. On the sporting front, a major athletics stadium, the Alexander stadium, was constructed to international specification, capable of hosting major events such as the European junior championships, international meetings, and the Women's Amateur Athletics Association/

[Mr. King]

Amateur Athletics Association national championships and Olympic qualifying meetings. The national indoor sports arena is soon to be built in the city centre. Those who have seen the architects' drawings know that that will be a tremendous asset for Birmingham and for the region. The national exhibition centre, which is being extended, hosts major sporting events such as the European figure skating championships in January 1989.

The development of sport as a people attraction resulted in Birmingham's ambitious bid to host the 1992 Olympic games. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) who is present today and who so ably led our delegation all over the world. As the years go by, we appreciate the great ambassadorial work that he did. Its effects are still being felt, because it focused world attention on Birmingham's ability to do things, to think big and to act big. If a great city such as Birmingham does not have confidence in itself, how can it show confidence in its people and promote the future we want for our citizens?

On the cultural level, the city council has invested heavily in its theatres, the city of Birmingham symphony orchestra and new festivals for jazz, film, readers and writers. It has recently agreed to relocate Sadler's Wells —a major achievement. We are not simply debating vroom, vroom for Brum, Brum and the promotion of a motor race, but promoting the city for cultural reasons, not only for sport and excitement. I was delighted when the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) tabled an early-day motion which was signed by most hon. Members representing Birmingham constituencies, welcoming the Sadler's Wells ballet to the city at some cost to the ratepayers, but I did not notice anyone demurring from that, because investment in such activities can only benefit our city and it is right and proper that a limited amount of promotional, recreational and cultural activity should take place.

On the business tourism front, a major new international convention centre is being constructed in the city centre, transforming a rundown area into a major development alongside the national indoor arena—an extensive leisure development opposite the new Hyatt hotel presently being constructed.

Some of my hon. Friends will wish to talk about the extent of the advances in tourism in the city. Birmingham is now the fifth most visited British city. That is a great achievement. It has not been instant, but it has developed because we are providing those facilities. About 40 hotels are currently being planned, built or opened as a result of the major new initiative in developing the city.

Ms. Short: The international convention centre and the highly subsidised Hyatt hotel are in my consituency. The development borders on an extremely rundown estate which has had no work done on it for years and has no community facilities and has more than 30 per cent. unemployment. The problem is that all those subsidies to the private sector are failing to bring resources to people in need in Birmingham.

Mr. King: The hon. Lady has answered her own problem. The national conference centre, the indoor sports arena, the Hyatt hotel and other developments currently under way are providing or will provide thousands of jobs for people in the immediate environment. That is the crux of the issue. Those places will have to be manned, maintained and run, and there is no reason why the hon. Lady's constituents should not find work. I admit that there are problems in the inner city, but they will be solved not simply be doling out money on a weekly basis, but by providing the infrastructure from the commercial sector wherever possible with help from the local authority to create jobs and provide opportunities for those people. I believe that the city council has been successful in providing that.

The Birmingham super prix has been part of the economic strategy. It is a high-profile, ambitious statement of intent that Birmingham is changing, married to the traditional engineering and organisational skills of the city. The Birmingham super prix has proved particularly successful in fulfilling the requirements set by the promoters of the Bill a few years ago.

Within those three years, the super prix has become established as a national event, as well as a sporting occasion. The organisers have created a festival that appeals to a family audience and one has only to visit it, as some of my hon. Friends have, to see that. I would have found it difficult to comment on the running of such an event had I not been there to see for myself what it means to the population in the surrounding area and to the economy of the city. Not only are there two days of motor racing, but the city comes to life, with street theatre and circus. Because the community has something to do in an area where it has been denied it for so long, criminal activity usually registers an all-time low. We are not surprised that, when the event takes place, there are few problems of violence and theft or the other traditional problems we associate with an inner-city environment.

The event has quickly developed and achieved high profile media coverage with live television and national news attention promoting the city of Birmingham. It has drawn a crowd the majority of whom come from outside Birmingham. At last year's event, market research showed that on Monday, 23 per cent. came from Birmingham, 29 per cent. from the midlands and 48 per cent. from the rest of the country. If we were trying to attract inward investment into the city, we could not have a better means than the super prix, because half the people watching it come from well outside the midlands. They are taking back home the visual impact of a city that is alive and dynamic, and in which investment is not misplaced.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Can my hon. Friend confirm that many of the hospitality suites situated around the super prix circuit are taken by companies from all over the United Kingdom with national and international connections and that they bring to Birmingham many business people who gain the impression that my hon. Friend has put forward so eloquently this evening?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend is right. He has visited the super prix and he said to me how envious he was that the city had been able to have such an event established. As the years go by and the event matures, it becomes increasingly self-perpetuating because of investment by many of the companies and organisations that relish the prospect of having a hospitality suite at a motor race meeting where, if it were not for the fencing, it would be almost possible to reach out and touch the cars. The cars are not right over

the other side of an airfield circuit, but are passing by the side of the spectators. That gives a unique dimension to an exciting sport.

There is high national public awareness of the event. An opinion poll conducted outside the midlands showed that 47 per cent. of those asked recognised Birmingham as the home of city centre motor racing. In the short space of three years, we have got the message home to the people who have visited the city that we are the capital of inner-city motor racing.

The event has brought direct economic benefits to the tourist industry. A survey of local hotels showed an increase of 110 per cent. in hotel occupancy and in terms of visitor expenditure, that represents about £500,000. Day visitors account for at least as much. The direct spending by the city council on the event represents more than £750,000 spent locally. Those figures are indicative of the cash injection in the local economy.

The city centre shops, which now open on the bank holiday, are well satisfied with the business generated by the motor race. In the first year of the event we had a problem. Many of the shopkeepers felt that the event would not bring them much custom because everybody would be watching the motor race. By a process of coaxing, they have gradually opened up their shops. We now find that, while the menfolk are watching the motor race, the ladies are shopping. That is an admirable development and a splendid opportunity for the city to offer a family day out, which one cannot enjoy at Silverstone or Brands Hatch. It is a major plus point.

It is important for the life of the city centre that its shops can compete over bank holidays with the attraction of the out-of-town shopping centres, and the motor race has enabled them to do that. We often hear about out-of-town planning developments, so to have an event that brings people into the city centre at a time when it would normally be deserted is significant in providing a living, dynamic and vibrant city centre.

The Birmingham super prix is now the second most prestigious motor race in the United Kingdom. It is the most prestigious round of the international formula 3000 championship and enables many teams of drivers to attract the sponsorship necessary to compete in the championship. The crowd is second in size only to the British grand prix and is the largest of any round of the international formula 3000 championship.

The Birmingham super prix has gone a long way to meeting the objectives of those who first envisaged the event almost 20 years ago, but just in case anyone feels that all I am reporting is a business bonanza, I must reveal that that learned organ of the capitalist press *Marxism Today* enthused about the race, considering it a Socialist achievement which has taken motor racing to the masses. With that endorsement, who can go wrong?

There are some constraints on the event which require legislative change, which is why we are here this evening. I shall now deal with some of the changes that the Birmingham City Council (No. 2) Bill seeks to bring about, so that we can continue to develop successfully this major attraction. The Birmingham City Council Act 1985 conferred on the city powers to run motor racing, but within certain constraints. The experience of having held the event for three years has resulted in the city council needing amendments to legislation to enable the city to overcome technical problems, to enhance the event and to reduce costs.

The Bill seeks to amend the 1985 Act in a number of ways. Firstly, it seeks to extend the number of days and to have more flexibility of dates to enable the super prix to continue. At present, it is confined to taking place on the Sunday and Monday on one of the two May bank holiday weekends or the August bank holiday weekend. It has been held over the August bank holiday weekend for the past three years and will be held again this year at that time. It is now proposed to extend the number of days available from two to four and to allow flexibility of dates so that the event can end on a Sunday or a bank holiday Monday in May, June, July, August or September.

There are powerful reasons for that. The formula 3000 international championship round held in Birmingham now requires three days, which is an international ruling outside the control of the city. We are fortunate in having a waiver for this year so that we can hold the race over two days, but that waiver will not continue, so we must extend the time in which the race can be held. Birmingham is granted a waiver through the international motor sport authority, FISA, to enable the event to run for two days.

Birmingham city council needs to protect the international stature of the event, as it has a track record of promoting the event over the past three years in a way that is attractive to the media, to the sponsors and to the spectators. The city wants especially to guarantee television coverage. Without the formula 3000 prestigious international race, which is only one step down from grand prix racing proper, the whole event would be in jeopardy. Birmingham city council therefore needs an extension to three days.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The hon. Gentleman has made an argument for extension from two to three days, but has not yet spoken about a fourth day. As I understand it, the only circumstances in which the city council would require the powers for a fourth day would be if a grand prix were offered and the city council was prepared to fork out £1 million for the privilege of staging it.

Mr. King: I was coming on to that important point in a moment.

Secondly, Birmingham city council believes that it has proved the super prix to be a major motor racing event. We should now be in a position to promote the most prestigious motor racing event, a grand prix, should one be offered. That would require four days. The city council wants to welcome back all the drivers now in grand prix racing who have driven at the Birmingham circuit over the past three years. Many drivers in formula 3000 go on to formula 1 racing, which is more prestigious. It is recognised that there is intense competition throughout the world for grand prix racing and that unless Birmingham city council is capable—I stress that word—of offering four days to the international motor sport authorities, it will never be offered a grand prix.

Thirdly, the difficulty is that, should the city be offered a grand prix, it could well fall on dates that are not at present available for it. In answer to what the hon. Member for Erdington said, it is not the city council's' intention actively to obtain a formula 1 grand prix. In any case, they are difficult to get. However, there may come a time when there will be the opportunity to stage such a prestigious event.

[Mr. King]

There is no doubt that a formula 1 grand prix meeting requires an outlay of about £1 million and, as the hon. Member for Erdington said, it will have to be debated by the local council at some considerable length. Indeed, it is only right and proper that the council should do so. However, in no way does this change in the legislation bring nearer the holding of a formula 1 meeting. Ultimately, it will be the city council that will have to debate the merits of investing that sort of money if the opportunity occurs, but frankly, I cannot see that happening for many years.

The plus side is that £1 million up front, if one can use that expression, stands a chance of earning a city such as Birmingham many more millions of pounds in income from the teams and from the enormous extra number of people who will come to the city during the three or four days that the circuit is available for use for practice or for the main event.

Mr. Rooker: Does the hon. Gentleman not appreciate that, in laying the foundations for such an event in the way that he has just explained, the city council would be required to overturn completely its stated policy from day one—a policy that is currently maintained—of not allowing cigarette advertising on the circuit? One cannot have formula 1 grand prix and keep that policy. Does the hon. Gentleman envisage that we should bring the merchants of death on to the streets of Birmingham? Is that what is in the minds of the promoters? Many consequences would flow from such a decision and would overturn existing commitments and promises that were given and received in good faith.

Mr. King: I know that that point concerns the hon. Gentleman, because it concerned him in relation to the original Bill in 1985. If my memory serves me correctly, such a situation has occurred before in formula 1 racing. Certain cars with cigarette advertising on them have had to have that advertising blanked over during meetings in a particular country. In any case, the criticism that the hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out would be a matter for debate by the local authority, which may well decide that such an event is not for them because of the restrictions that may be placed on it by the Formula 1 Contractors' Association, which at some stage may say, "No, we are not going to abide by any cover-up of cigarette advertising."

As it is, I believe that only two teams, Camel Lotus and McClaren, are closely identified with cigarette advertising and use colours that are associated with popular cigarettes. That is a tenuous connection, and as far as I know no overt publicity or promotion is given to the event in that way——

Mr. Rooker: But smoking kills people.

Mr. King: I stress that, if the opportunity of a formula 1 race meeting is offered to the city, it will be the subject of most intense debate and the point raised by the hon. Gentleman will no doubt be discussed by the local authority.

Mr. Rooker: I am sorry, but I shall have to press this, because the hon. Gentleman has failed to meet the point. One of the reasons that this House, in its wisdom, gave Birmingham approval for the 1985 Act—we all agreed with it when it finally went through for reasons that I shall explain later—was the commitment that was given, but that commitment is not written into the Act. If the city council wishes to overturn its policy on tobacco, it does not have to come back to the House. Given the fact that the biggest cause of death in this country is coronary heart disease and that the biggest single independent factor involved in those 3,000 deaths per week is smoking, I should be even more opposed to all this than I was before. However, as a Member of Parliament, I would be prevented from raising the matter, because the event will have been sub-contracted to the local authority.

Mr. King: I have no doubt that, if the opportunity arose to stage a formula 1 meeting—it is a slender one—the hon. Gentleman would have the opportunity to press his point.

If the city council wishes to offer amendments to what it has formerly agreed—as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, that commitment is not included in the Act—it is for the city council to try to persuade the hon. Gentleman that there will be adequate safeguards. If a formula 1 race meeting is agreed by the city council, I imagine that it will be agreed on certain conditions with the Formula 1 Contractors Association. If people agreed that cigarette advertising was anathema to the local authority—to be fair to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) I must confess that I would support that view—the contractors would be required to remove such advertising from their cars.

There is nothing new here. The issue will be considered on its merits and I have no difficulty in saying that the local authority and its Members of Parliament—presumably we shall all be consulted—will have an opportunity to make our voices known.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that, when the previous Act was introduced in the House in 1985, objections to tobacco advertising were raised by myself and my hon. Friends. I was given a written assurance by a senior member of the council——

Ms. Short: It is not worth anything.

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend says that that assurance is not worth anything, but I shall draw attention to what I regard as assurances that have been broken later in the debate if I succeed in catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I advise the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) that I was given written assurances that there would be no cigarette advertising connected with the event. Will the hon. Gentleman make it quite clear to the House, because he is now responsible for sponsoring this Bill, whether he regards the city council as having an option to keep that assurance?

Mr. King: I have no problems in saying that, if the city council made those assurances—and yes, it did; we were all here when we debated the original Bill in April 1985—I see no reason why that agreement should have been rescinded in any way. I think that it still holds absolutely good, and there should be no problems on that score.

Mr. Davis: I must press the hon. Gentleman. Will he give a categorical assurance as the hon. Member promoting the Bill that he would not condone any decision

to allow cigarette advertising in the course of a grand prix event—and what is more, that it will not happen because of the assurance that was given to hon. Members in 1985?

Mr. King: I thought that I had just made that point quite clear. I am giving that assurance. As far as I am aware, nothing has changed from what was previously agreed. Unless the hon. Gentleman can produce a letter saying that things have changed, we must assume—I assume and I give him the assurance—that that commitment still holds good and that there is no question of cigarette advertising being allowed on racing cars or even of the promotion of cigarettes being allowed within the environment of the circuit. I willingly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. I cannot imagine that anyone would want to change such an assurance.

Mr. Jack: Perhaps I can assist my hon. Friend by telling him that, at the moment, the West German grand prix requires that all forms of written promotion for cigarette advertising be removed from the cars, and that is what happens. The cars remain in their colours but there are no sponsors' names on them. Does my hon. Friend agree that motor sport is now increasingly being used as a promotional tool for another environmentally sensitive issue—lead-free petrol?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend made a good point at the end of his intervention and I am grateful to him for reminding me that it is in the West German grand prix that such advertising is removed. Therefore, the safeguards do exist, and I can give the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) an assurance on behalf of the promoters that what was previously agreed still holds good now. There is no question of us going back on that.

It is also a requirement in the revised rules of running a formula 3000 event that the circuit must be altered to provide a safer pit area. At the moment, the area is somewhat confined and cars have to decelerate quite quickly and engage in a few twists and turns to get into the pit area. In addition, the acceleration lane is not long enough to allow them to build up to a circuit speed. Although the circuit is perfectly safe, it is felt by FISA and the organisers of formula 3000 that improvements have to be made.

The city council wishes to do that by changing the circuit slightly to enable racing to take place on the inward carriageway of Bristol street, thus releasing the outward carriageway of Bristol street for use as pits. That would require the construction of a short link road between the two carriageways. It will make for a more attractive and interesting motor race and one which, by implication, will be a great deal safer.

Clause 7, the new section 4(2) in schedule 3, and clause 6(1) involve longer highway closures. Under the 1985 Act powers, highways are closed for the event from 9 am to 6 pm. At the request of the police, highways are in fact closed from 6 am under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847. The city council wishes to have that additional time specifically mentioned in the Act.

Racing—by which I mean practice—will not take place on any day before 9 am. In addition, two additional hours at the end of racing are proposed to allow racing to finish should there be any delays during the day due to crashes. Because of bad weather and incidents on the circuit, we have experienced delays because of the time taken to restore the circuit to its correct and safe state. Last year, that resulted in us losing two races at the end of the day, when we had to close the circuit and re-open the roads at 6 pm.

Speaking as a witness and as a pure matter of fact, there is little sense in losing such races, because the amount of public access to the roads for two or three hours after 6 o'clock on a bank holiday Monday is negligible. That is thanks to the superb arrangements made by the West Midlands police to route traffic away from the circuit. We submit that for the circuit to be used for an extra two or three hours would not excessively infringe anyone's right of movement.

Ms. Short: The hon. Gentleman has forgotten that people live within the circuit and for them getting in and out of their houses and driving their cars to the shop or church in the evening is a serious concern. They do not welcome the extension of hours.

If it was legal to close the streets for longer than the times granted under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, why are those powers needed in this Bill? Has there been some doubt about the legality of the extended road closing in previous years?

Mr. King: As far as I know, the hon. Lady can rest assured that there is no illegality. The police have powers to make limited closures in the way that I have described under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847. However, I believe that, to put this on a regular basis, it is right that the promoters should bring the Bill to the House to request that it be written into the Act. With the permission of the House, we are extending the days from two to four and in that way exceed the limited role of the police to make specific changes now and again. We need to study the implications behind such extension of road closures. Other hon. Members may wish to speak about the reaction of the local community to the city's proposals through, for example, opinion poll sampling, and, perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will allow such debate.

Mr. Terry Davis: On the question of closing the roads for certain periods of certain days, will the hon. Gentleman clarify the meaning of the Bill that he is introducing? The Bill would make it possible for the city council to close the roads for four days instead of two, as at present, and to close them for four days at any time between the end of April and the beginning of October, with the fourth day being either a bank holiday or a Sunday. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the effect of the Bill is that the city council can decide to have a road race on any Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday between the beginning of May and the end of September, to close the streets for all four days and to close them until 8 o'clock instead of 6 o'clock in the evening?

Mr. King: That is a fair summation of what we propose.

Mr. Davis: In that case, why did the hon. Gentleman tell the House that there was no problem, because it involved only two hours on a bank holiday Monday?

Mr. King: As a result of experience, a certain number of engineering days are allowed to set up and to dismantle the circuit, to which clauses 3(b) and 6 refer. Under the 1985 Act, the number of days available for the safety fence erection works is 10 days before and five days after the event. The city council wishes to extend that to 20 days

[Mr. King]

after the event. That will minimise the engineering works undertaken in anti-social hours, thus minimising disruption to residents, to businesses and to traffic.

It must be accepted that any work carried out within the confines of the highway will inevitably cause some disruption to the traffic using the roads. The problem experienced by the council is that, because of the restricted time that it is allowed to set up the circuit, it requires more men working and more disruption. It is hoped that, by spreading the period when the erection and the dismantling of the circuit can take place, the inconvenience to the road users and to the local residents—one must take into account their day-to-day problems—will be reduced dramatically. They will not therefore have to face the high pressure of the circuit engineer building the circuit with the consequent disruption that we have experienced.

Additionally, because of the time restriction, there is the cost of working through the night on many occasions, which is also disruptive to local residents. By extending the engineering days in such a way, the work can be carried out during the day, when the residents will not be inconvenienced by night-time noise and work.

Ms. Short: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that one Birmingham citizen, who I believe lived in his constituency, has died as a result of the barriers being erected in advance? It was the Birmingham coroner who called for changes to be considered when building barriers on the city's super prix route. Can the hon. Gentleman assure us that the fact that someone has died means that the coroner's remarks have been taken into account and that people's lives will not be put at risk in future?

Mr. King: The hon. Lady has probably given a clear indication why we are making some of our proposals. It has been disruptive to install the barriers in the way that we have because of the time restraints. That has required contractors in vehicles to occupy the highways and lift the ARMCO barrier into position in a way that we do not like. By spreading out the time available, one can have fewer people working for a longer period, which will have a less disruptive influence on traffic that is on the highway at the same time.

The hon. Lady has reminded us of the tragedy. How directly attributable that was to working on the super prix circuit——

Ms. Short: The coroner said that it was.

Mr. King: Then I bow to his thinking. I believe that our proposed changes to the Bill will reduce the incidence of any danger to the public. That is one of the driving elements behind the changes.

Ms. Short: Has the hon. Gentleman made up that answer on the spur of the moment, or does he really know that safety has been taken into account? It is a serious matter when a life has been taken and the coroner has said that it was due to the way that the roadworks were being carried out. The gentleman who died was Mr. Taylor, of Staple Lodge road, Northfield, so I presume that he was the hon. Gentleman's constituent.

Will the hon. Gentleman assure me that safety has been taken into account in reorganising the way in which the barriers will be erected? If not, is he just saying that off the top of his head, without knowing whether safety has been properly considered?

Mr. King: The hon. Lady is right to be concerned. I say again that the entire exercise of extending the time in which engineering work will take place is designed to reduce the inconvenience to road users and to local people. Because we are reducing the inconvenience, that must imply that we are intending to do so in as safe and as efficient manner as we can.

One cannot guarantee that somebody will not have an accident because of work that is taking place. In all honesty, no one can say that. However, steps are taken and will be taken to minimise that possibility. I have no doubt that, as a result of what the coroner has said about that accident, the city engineers and those responsible for erecting the circuit will pay particular attention to ensuring that such an accident is not repeated. No one would want anybody to be the innocent victim of what is a strong social event and an entertaining spectacle.

Schedule 2 outlines police costs. The 1985 Act gave the West Midlands police full indemnity for their costs arising in connection with the race. That is unique, because the costs include the policing costs outside the sporting area as well as inside. The costs also include planning and the staffing of police headquarters. Birmingham city council has no influence over the level of policing, as that is an operational decision of the chief constable. As a consequence, extremely high costs have been carried by the city council—they have averaged much more than £100,000. The city council feels that that is unfair, as the figure represents about a quarter of the total police bill to football clubs for all matches played in the west midlands in one season.

One of the problems has been that, because of the stated requirements, some of the costs have been much higher than originally estimated way back in the early 1980s. During the three years of the event, however, the police have reported only a handful of incidents leading them to take action. The city council is currently discussing the matter with the police authority, and it hopes to reach agreement leading to an amendment being put to the Committee, should the Bill receive a Second Reading.

The city council would also like the House to consider the insurance costs. Section 20 of the 1985 Act establishes strict liability for personal injury or damage to property without proof of negligence. That is unusual, as negligence normally has to be proved. The consequence has been an extremely high insurance premium of around £200,000 a year. The council originally wanted to repeal this section of the 1985 Act, because experience of three years racing suggested that it was unjustified. However, it has noted the concern of local residents, businesses and hon. Members and it will put an amendment to the Committee to reinstate strict liability without proof of evidence for residents, spectators, businesses and statutory undertakers. That cover will not include drivers, their teams or associated personnel involved in the super prix, including the media. The latter will need to prove negligence. It is felt that, in any case, those in the latter category are well aware of the risks they take at this sport.

It is important to mention the accounting procedures that the city council has adopted over the years, given their importance to the perception of the super prix as a profitable operation. I am sure that other hon. Members

will also want to comment on this. The 1985 Act placed upon the city council the obligation to make a cumulative profit over five years in order to retain its powers to run motor racing. In addition, the Act obliged the city council to adopt commercial accountancy procedures rather than local government accountancy procedures. Section 14 of the 1985 Act refers to that and was inserted following objections to the Bill in 1985.

The city council was advised as to the proper presentation of its motor race accounts by its auditors. Because of the unusual nature of commercial accounts within a local government setting, the city council sought counsel's opinion on the presentation of the accounts. It has been guided by that advice. It was right for the city council to comply with the advice of its auditors.

The financial outcome is as follows. In the report to the general purposes committee of Birmingham city council on 3 October 1984, the city treasurer reported his estimates of costs and revenue for the motor race. The estimated costs ranged from £1·35 million to £1·8 million and the estimated income was £1·35 million. The treasurer concluded:

"From a prudent financial viewpoint it is considered that the first motor racing event on the streets of the city may not generate large profits. It is anticipated that a similar position would result from the second or third events. . .Whilst the promotional benefits of staging road races cannot be quantified it must be accepted that there is immense potential. It is thus suggested that, if a loss were to be made that it would be right to judge such as part of the overall costs of promotion and publicity of the city."

That was before the original Bill came to the House.

In 1986, the costs were £1,530,000; in 1987, they were £1,561,000; in 1988, the provisional costs—the accounts have not yet been audited—were £1,213,000. Those figures are within the estimates set. The income in 1986 was £898,000; in 1987 it was £1,122,000, and in 1988 it was £1,213,000—that figure may vary by £1,000 either way. In other words, the city lost money in years one and two but broke even last year. Those are the figures if one accepts or adopts local government accounting methods. If one considers those figures in the light of commercial accounting methods, as necessitated by the 1985 Act, they reveal that in 1986 the city lost £173,051; in 1987 it made a profit of £76,557 and in 1988 it made a profit of £565,494. The cumulative figure for the years to date shows that a profit of about £470,000 has been made. Those are the figures that the auditors have looked at and approved.

It is clear, judged by normal local government accounting conventions and commercial accounting conventions, that the race is profitable and will go forward from strength to strength. Other hon. Members may wish to argue the merits of the accounts or the way in which they have been drawn up, but those figures are subject to audit and the auditors are clear that the city has adopted the correct accountancy procedures and that the figures, as presented in the accounts, stand the test of examination.

My speech has been extended because of the interventions by many hon. Members. I thought it was right and proper to allow them to do so, as that avoids much repetition later on. Those interventions have also helped to clarify the issues and the concerns about which they are rightly worried.

I have pleasure in presenting the Bill to the House. I hope that all hon. Members will realise that the Bill comes from the people of Birmingham—from the local authority—with support from all sections of the political parties. It illustrates the city's desire and determination to see the motor race prosper and to grab the opportunities that are available to ensure that the city maintains its dynamic drive towards future prosperity and competitiveness in this its 100th year.

8.26 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) took 28 minutes of his speech to reach the Bill. During those first 28 minutes he described the economic benefits of running a motor race through the streets of Birmingham.

The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand that the disagreement within the Labour party about this matter does not concern whether there are economic benefits, but how those economic benefits should be generated. I found it rather amusing that the hon. Gentleman, a Conservative Member, extolled the merits of public expenditure as a way of generating employment in Birmingham or elsewhere. The disagreement within the Labour party is not about whether there should be expenditure to generate jobs, but what sort of expenditure should generate what sort of jobs. The argument within the Labour party is about priorities. We believe that in deciding to spend money on the motor race—in subsidising a motor race—the city council has forgone the opportunity to spend money on social services, on education, on housing and on all the other activities for which people elect city councillors. Those services generate jobs as well as providing services for those in need.

Ms. Short: My hon. Friend is right that there are differences of view in the Labour party. Is he aware that a meeting of the Selly Oak local area sub-committee voted against the road race and that the Tory representatives voted against? There seem to be differences of opinion in all parties.

Mr. Davis: I was not aware of that and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to our attention.

The hon. Member for Northfield briefly addressed the fact that when the 1985 Bill was introduced to the House of Commons by Sir Reginald Eyre, the House was told not only that we would derive all the economic benefits, described by the hon. Gentleman for 28 minutes, but that we would also receive a profit. We were told that the race would make a profit without anything being charged to the ratepayers and that that profit would in turn be used to improve social services, education and housing. It has not made a profit without a charge being made on the rates.

Mr. Denis Howell: It has.

Mr. Davis: If my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) disagrees, he will no doubt have an opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, but, if he disagrees, I will certainly want to examine his figures after this debate.

There are two reasons for opposing this Bill. The first is the effect of the road race on the people who live near the circuit. There is no doubt in my mind, having talked to representatives of residents in that area, that there is a tremendous noise and disruption as a result of the road race. At the time of the 1985 Bill we were told that people living in the area welcomed the excitement, glamour and pleasure they would derive from watching a road race pass their front windows, and we were told there were surveys

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which supported that. I did not disagree with that argument, but people living in the area have experienced three road races, and there is now evidence that many of them do not want the road race to continue and that even more of them are very concerned about the possibility of a bigger road race taking place—a formula 1 road race—for a period of four days.

It is not only the people who live in the area who have strong feelings about the disruption caused by the road race. People living further afield suffer a great deal of inconvenience in commuting to the city centre during the period of the road race during the road works before and after the race. I leave it to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Ladywood (Ms. Short) and other hon. Members whose constituents are adversely affected to describe the effects of the road race in detail.

The problems people have at the moment will clearly be made worse by the proposals in this Bill, and I cannot advise the House to accept the assurances given by the hon. Member for Northfield, who is no doubt acting in good faith; so was Sir Reginald Eyre when he gave assurances to this House four years ago. Those assurances have not been kept.

For example, the hon. Member for Northfield said that we should extend the period of the works to 20 days, which would enable them to be done at less anti-social times, which will reduce the effect on people living in the area, but there is no guarantee that that will happen; it is not written into the Bill. The Bill gives the council the opportunity to do the road works over a period of 20 days at unsocial as well as other hours.

Similarly, the hon. Member says that the council would not want to have a road race for four days unless it were formula 1 rather than formula 3. Again, that is not guaranteed in the Bill. Indeed, when I intervened in his speech and asked him to confirm whether it was possible under a clause in this Bill to have a formula 3 or super prix race over a period of four days on any weekend between the beginning of May and the end of September, he said that it was. In the previous Bill, which became an Act, we were assured that the super prix would take place only on one of three weekends; it would have to be a bank holiday weekend, over Sunday and bank holiday Monday, on one of the two bank holiday weekends in May or the one in August.

However, this Bill gives the council the opportunity to have a race for four days on any weekend between May and August, and there is no guarantee that the council will not take this opportunity and will not operate like the moneylender in "The Merchant of Venice" and demand its pound of flesh because it is entitled to it under the terms of this Bill. I am not prepared to accept the hon. Member's assurances, although I am sure that he gives them in good faith.

This Bill would also enable the council to close the streets from 6 am to 8 pm instead of the present shorter period. The Bill would enable it to refuse to idemnify the costs of the police authority. In such a week, after last Saturday's tragedy, I am amazed that anybody can argue in this House about the level of policing which the police force judge to be appropriate for any sporting event or that anyone wants to refuse to pay for that policing. As it stands, the Bill would also enable the council to escape its strict liability obligations, which were included in the previous Act.

I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's assurances, which brings me to the second reason for opposing this Bill—we have had assurances before. We had clear and explicit assurances four years ago. I refer to the financial arrangements for the road race, the assurances given then by the city council to this House, and the assurances given in this House by Sir Reginald Eyre on behalf of the city council; assurances incorporated, as we were told, into the Bill which became the 1985 Act; assurances which in my opinion have now been broken.

These assurances took two forms. The first was that if the council were allowed to use £1·5 million of its capital allocation to pay for the capital expenditure required for the road race—an allocation from the Government intended to pay for repairs to council houses—the money would be recovered over a period of five years from the income generated by the road race and that the money would be recycled to pay for those repairs. That assurance was not only given in this House but was confirmed in a letter to me from the leader of the city council dated 21 June 1985. When I discussed the wording of the Bill with the representative of the city treasurer's department or the city solicitor's department, Mr. Allport, I was promised that the assurance would be given effect. That was one of the reasons why I dropped my objections to the Bill at the time.

Subsequently, I had correspondence with the city solicitor about this matter and was told that the capital expenditure on essential services would be financed by the road race. That assurance has not been kept. When I raised this point with Councillor John Charlton, the chairman of the general purposes committee, a few months ago, he told me that the promise had been kept and referred me to the city treasurer. I took up that invitation and had a very frank discussion with the city treasurer. I was told by him that he had had to find £1·5 million to honour the assurance given to this House, but he did not find it in the money generated by the road race; it was money made available to the city council for other reasons.

Mr. Denis Howell *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Davis: My right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath shakes his head, but Mr. Bernard Farrar, the city treasurer, explained this to me in careful detail. The £1·5 million came not from the road race but from the Severn-Trent water authority, and that money was used to pay for council house repairs. When I put it to the city treasurer that that was all very well but that it was still open to the city council to increase the money spent on repairing council houses by that £1·5 million as well as £1·5 million re-cycled from the income of the road race, he had to admit that that was correct. We were promised that the money would come from the road race over a period of five years, and that promise has not been kept. I repeat that it is not being kept for the benefit of my right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath who keeps intervening from a sedentary position.

Mr. Denis Howell: The purpose of this interruption is to point out that the hon. Gentleman said this has to be done over five years. I accept what he says, but the race has been on for only three years.

Mr. Davis: It is not the intention of the city council.

Mr. Howell: Oh, yes it is.

Mr. Davis: I have here a letter dated 30 January, from Councillor John Charlton, chairman of the general purposes committee, who is claiming that the assurance has been kept, not that it will be kept in the future, and it was he who referred me to the city treasurer. When I spoke to the city treasurer, he explained to me what had happened and that it was not money from the road race and would not be from the road race. So that assurance, in my judgment, has not been kept, and the city treasurer was kind enough to say that he understood my view.

The second assurance which has not been kept is that the road race would not be subsidised by the ratepayers of Birmingham. In other words, we were told that the road race would make a profit, not a loss, so there would not be any question of money being spent on the road race instead of on repairs to houses and schools, on employing more teachers' home helps and occupational therapists, or on adaptation's to the homes of people with disabilities. We were told that none of those things would take second place to the road race and that money would not be spent on the road race rather than on those vital services for the people of Birmingham. We were told that profit would provide money for increased expenditure on all those things.

Mr. Howell: Quite right.

Mr. Davis: My right hon. Friend's memory is correct. That is what we were promised. We were told that the profit would be used to improve services for the people of Birmingham. We were specifically told that if the road race did not make a cumulative profit for the first five years, it would not be held again. The council was so confident that it said that the race would not be held then in spite of all the other benefits described by the hon. Member for Northfield. That assurance has not been kept.

The assurances were given at a very early stage in our discussions on the Bill which became the Birmingham City Council Act 1985. The city council issued a document in January 1985 which stated:

"The view from the consultants is that a profit of at least £1 million would be made on the first event, with even larger profits in the future. . .The most pessimistic view is that in the short term, income and expenses will break even. No charge will fall on the rates."

That document was followed by an advertisement which appeared in *The House Magazine* on 25 January 1985 which stated succinctly under the headline "Birmingham ratepayers won't be paying for it":

"The cost to the ratepayers of Birmingham? Absolutely nothing. Indeed it will be to their benefit as more cash will be brought into the authority's kitty."

Mr. Howell: Quite right.

Mr. Davis: I hope that my right hon. Friend will continue to follow my argument.

Another document was issued which stated:

"The race will make money for the city council so the ratepayer will not lose out. We will not be taking decisions on whether to repair leaking roofs or to support the race. The road race will bring more cash into the authority's kitty."

The then chairman of the general purposes committee wrote a letter in which she said:

"the support given to the motor race will not reduce the amount of resources available for other purposes. In fact, in a profit situation, the funds available for these purposes will actually increase and of course it is our hope that besides promoting the city and encouraging tourism, the racing will generate income which we can use on community and social services."

That was backed up by another letter from the then city treasurer, Mr. Paul Sabin, who referred first to capital expenditure, and who said:

"It can be regarded as good value for money in the sense that it will generate income from the motor race which will improve the city's revenue position and thereby free resources to be spent on other services. In the long run, housing, education etc. could well benefit significantly from the motor race . . . Since we envisage the motor race at worst breaking even in revenue or year-to-year operating terms, and probably generating significant income, there is no question of revenue resources being diverted from other spending areas . . . There is no conflict of priorities . . . It would not take long for annual benefits to cancel out the initial capital contribution and therefore should perhaps be seen as a major financial factor in this debate."

When the Birmingham City Council Bill was introduced in March 1985, a circular was sent to some hon. Members which stated:

"The race will make money for the city council and will not therefore be a burden on the ratepayers."

Mr. Denis Howell: Quite right.

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is still with me. I hope that he will continue to be with me.

The Birmingham City Council Bill had its Second Reading on 1 April 1985. Sir Reginald Eyre said:

"Since the city envisages the motor race at worst breaking even in revenue on year-to-year operating terms, and probably generating significant income, there is no question of revenue resources being diverted from other spending areas . . . It is the hope of the city council, based on careful study of all the factors involved, that besides promoting the city and encouraging tourism"—

I emphasise those words, "besides promoting the city and encouraging tourism"—

"the motor racing will generate income and so extra resources for the city."—[*Official Report*, 1 April 1985; Vol. 76, c. 962-63.]

My colleagues and I continued to have some scepticism about those claims and we regarded them as being exaggerated. Nevertheless, the Bill received its Second Reading and went into Committee. In Committee, questions were raised about the financial arrangements for the race. An hon. Member for Manchester is recorded as asking who would be responsible for any financial loss resulting from the ratepayers. A representative of the city council in the presence of the agents Sharpe, Pritchard and Company, the same agents for this Bill, answered:

"It was not thought likely, however: expert analysis projected a £1 million profit on a £1·5 million outlay not including the spin-off from tourism."

Many of my hon. Friends subsequently received a letter from the leader of the city council, who wrote:

"As far as I am concerned, however, to keep running a road race at a loss is not on. We will therefore bring in an amendment in the Lords to provide that the race shall not take place if an operating loss is still made in the fifth year of the event."

That letter was sent by Councillor Dick Knowles on 21 June 1985.

On 24 June, Sir Reginald Eyre said in the House:

"In principle, a requirement that the race would not continue—that is, that the powers to operate the race would cease—if the event could not be staged without incurring annual losses, is accepted. The city council would not want to continue running the race if it had to require support from the ratepayers each year . . . The intention is to introduce an

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amendment in another place to deal fully with the principle of the new clause . . . I am giving an undertaking of equivalent value"—

that is, equivalent value to a new clause or amendment, which had been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood. Sir Reginald Eyre said:

"I am giving an undertaking of equivalent value in that such an amendment will be introduced in another place. I give that undertaking on behalf of the city council."

When pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood, he said:

"I have given an undertaking without reservation on behalf of Birmingham city coucil."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1985; Vol. 81 columns 712-13.]

The intentions of Sir Reginald Eyre and the city council were clear: the race would generate a profit and would not require any subvention from the rate fund.

On 4 July, we resumed the Report stage of the Birmingham City Council Bill. In the meantime, there had been private discussions between myself on behalf of my hon. Friends and Sir Reginald Eyre in the presence of other council representatives. Sir Reginald Eyre was very forthcoming and he accepted the strength of feelings of myself and my hon. Friends. He assured me that it was not the intention to run the race at a loss, that the council would stop it after five years if there was a cumulative loss, and that there would be no subsidy from the rates on any grounds. I accepted in good faith what Sir Reginald Eyre told me and I advised my hon. Friends to drop their objections to the 1985 Bill. My hon. Friends accepted that I was also acting in good faith, and we agreed that we could trust Sir Reginald Eyre's assurances. A new clause was tabled by him to give effect to the assurances that he had given to me and my hon. Friends.

New clause 3, which was brought before the House on 14 July 1985, became section 14 of the Act. Subsection 5 says:

"If the statements for the first five financial years in which the council provide motor races show a cumulative deficit, the power to provide motor races shall cease to be exercisable by the council."

Sir Reginald Eyre, explaining the purpose of that new clause, said:

"New clause 3 is designed to meet the points that were made in the earlier debates. This provision meets my undertaking that if the revenue accounts for the first five financial years in which the council provides motor races show a cumulative deficit, the power to provide motor races shall cease to be exercisable by the council."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 1985; Vol. 82, c. 577.]

On that basis, my hon. Friends and I allowed the Bill to become an Act of Parliament, and the city council issued this community bulletin:

"In spite of what has been suggested by the few critics of the race proposals, it will not cost the ratepayers anything.

In fact, financial analysts have projected that, far from costing money, the event will put much-needed profits into the city's kitty, and this means more to spend on the services we all need."

Those are not my words; they are the words of the city council. That is what the council said would happen; that is what it said was built into the Bill; that is the assurance that it gave.

Unfortunately, the first race was held in 1986, and it made a loss. The second race was held in 1987, and it made a loss. In February 1988, the city council was faced with the problem of having to meet the assurances that it had given to this House, as expressed in section 14 of the Act.

Ms. Short: My hon. Friend is telling his story very well. We all lived through this. There has been a great deal of talk about the way in which the accounts were kept. Can my hon. Friend confirm that implementaton of the provisions in the Act about the way in which the accounts should be presented is entirely a matter for the city council? Is it not a fact that the council chose that way of recording the accounts, and did not have it imposed by others?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. I do not propose to go into detail about my discussions with Sir Reginald Eyre. I took him as representing the city council. After all, he sponsored the Bill in this House. I had known him for several years in his role as a member of the Conservative party. I disagreed with him about many political issues, but I would never have questioned his integrity or his good faith. I believed what he was telling me, indeed, I believe that he believed what he was telling me—that there would not be any cost to the ratepayers of Birmingham if the race were to go ahead and if, at the end of five years, there were to be a cumulative deficit, the race would not be held again.

In February 1988 the city council officers found that they had a problem. They had a loss of nearly £600,000 from the race in 1986, and a loss of about £400,000 in 1987, and they had trouble with the auditors. The auditors came to look at the road race accounts, and found that some items that should have been included in those accounts had not been included. I refer to items such as hospitality for VIPs, which had been charged to other accounts. The council argued that that expenditure had been incurred under provisions of other legislation and that therefore there was no need to show it as a cost against the road race. The auditors said that that was not right and that the council must put the expenditure into the road race account.

The auditors also told the council that it must include depreciation. I have some sympathy for the council on that. It is a detailed point, and the city council made a great issue of it in discussions with my hon. Friends and myself. Actually, the figures show that the amounts included for depreciation are nothing like the total of the losses.

There is some dispute about what happened at the meeting with the auditors. Certainly, it is clear to me that the suggestion came from that meeting that the council should consider putting a sum of money into the road race account for the benefit of promoting tourism in the city. It is not clear who made that suggestion. It was based on the preamble of the Act, which says:

"The city is a major commercial and industrial centre and, with a view to promoting the city and encouraging tourism and attracting business, it is expedient that the council be authorised to provide or arrange for the provision of motor races on certain streets in the city."

I emphasise that those words were in the preamble from the very beginning. At no stage was it suggested that those words justified a credit to the road race account from the rates account. At no time was that suggested, by Sir Reginald Eyre or anybody else, and it was never thought of until the meeting took place nearly two years after the first road race had been held.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend is making a useful and a very important point. It is one that has to be put on the record for the benefit of all hon. Members and for

everyone else who may read the report of this debate. The preamble to a private Bill is not the same as the preamble to a public Bill. Most of us do not bother with preambles. Until this issue arose, until I saw what happened last October, I never knew that the preamble was amendable. I never dreamt that anything from section 1 of an Act had the legal force to rub out sections.

This is a valuable point that my hon. Friend is making. The preamble to this Act runs to eight paragraphs of crucial importance. At that time, I had 12 years' experience in this House. I freely admit that, despite that experience, I had never seen anyone attempt to amend a preamble. I had never heard a preamble debated, or seen anyone rest a case on a preamble. Hon. Members concern themselves only with clauses and scheules to Bills—later, sections and schedules to the Acts.

My hon. Friend is giving all hon. Members a warning. We all make law, though we are not all lawyers. This is a warning about the importance of the preambles to Bills, whether private or public. Generally speaking, this problem arises in the case of private Bills because the preambles to such Bills are much longer, much more full of information, than the preambles to public Bills.

Mr. Davis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Before giving way, I had reached the question of the meeting with the city auditors, Price Waterhouse. It is absolutely clear—there is no question—that nobody had suggested before 1988 that there should be a credit to the road race account from the rates account on the ground of that preamble. There is some confusion about whose idea it was at that meeting with the city auditors. Councillor John Charlton, chairman of the general purposes committee, has told my hon. Friends and myself that the suggestion came from the auditors themselves. Well, I put that to Price Waterhouse, and they disclaim all credit—or rather odium—for the suggestion. I do not think that we shall ever find out where the idea came from, but what we can be clear about is the motive for it.

Mr. Roger King: Perhaps I can help the hon. Member in trying to establish where this solution came from. It came from Price Waterhouse themselves. I have here a copy of a letter, dated 12 April 1989, to the hon. Gentleman. It says:

"Accordingly, when the first road race accounts were being compiled we took notice of the requirements of the 1985 Act and, in particular, those set out in section 14. My staff quite properly, and as part of normal procedure, questioned whether the accounts were drawn up correctly and if all amounts of expenditure and income had been included . . . In addition, on a point of principle, my staff questioned whether, in accounting terms, the road race account should reflect income for sponsorship from the city."

It seems to me quite clear that the auditors actually pointed this out when they were auditing the first road race accounts.

Mr. Davis: I am very sorry that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to quote the letter to me from Price Waterhouse. He forces me to refer to the correspondence in some detail. On 11 April I wrote to Price Waterhouse in these terms —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends may be disappointed that I am going to refer to all this correspondence, but it is he, not I, who has quoted from it. This is the letter that I sent to Price Waterhouse:

"I understand that you were responsible for suggesting that the city council should avoid the intention of section 14 of the 1985 Act by using the preamble as authority for crediting the 1986-87 and the 1987-88 road race accounts with a total of £1,050,000, and I should be grateful if you will confirm this point because I want to refer to it during the debate in the House of Commons on the Birmingham City Council (No. 2) Bill."

The hon. Member for Northfield quoted from Price Waterhouse's reply, but he did not read the whole of it. He missed out the preceding paragraph which said:

"The statement set out in your letter is not correct."

I was asking Price Waterhouse whether it was responsible and it said that it was not. I wrote a long letter back in which I said:

"I repeat that I have been told that a credit for promotional value was suggested by Price Waterhouse, and that the idea of a credit based on a preamble to the 1985 Act was not initiated by the city council."

Today I received a message which was taken down in shorthand from Mr. Walls of Price Waterhouse in which he said:

"On the matter of the road race there are several things that I might have said to Mr. Davis personally, but I do not have a lot to add to my letter of 12 April. Mr. Davis must understand that Price Waterhouse give advice to the city as well as audit the city as they do with all their clients. I am pretty certain that I did not suggest, as he has put several times in his letters, that the preamble of the 1985 Act should be used to justify this credit to the road race account."

The hon. Member for Northfield has just suggested that Price Waterhouse accepted responsibility. Mr. Walls of Price Waterhouse dictated that message today. He said:

"I am pretty certain that I did not suggest, as he has put several times in his letters, that the preamble of the 1985 Act should be used to justify this credit to the road race account."

Wherever the responsibility lies, the important thing is that the city solicitor then sought advice from Queen's counsel. I have looked at the instructions that were given to the Queen's counsel by the city solicitor. He left Queen's counsel in no doubt whatever about the purpose behind this suggestion of a credit to the road race account on the ground that the road race had promoted tourism on the basis of the preamble to the 1985 Act.

That was not the only suggestion. The city council also asked for the advice of Queen's council on the possibility of increasing the grant which the city council gives to the Birmingham convention and visitor bureau in the confident expectation—the bureau's chairman is a leading city councillor—that the bureau would then give a grant to the road race. If that is not creative accounting, I do not know what is. Even the city solicitor—especially the city solicitor—had some qualms about that.

The city solicitor makes it quite clear in his instructions to counsel that

"If such an arrangement were possible it would sidestep the thinking behind section 14 of the Act which was to prevent the council subsidising a loss-making motor race indefinitely."

That was the motivation. It was to sidestep an Act of Parliament. That is what the council officers and senior members of the city council were doing. They knew that they had given an assurance that if the race made a loss, they would stop it after five years. They were looking for a way of sidestepping section 14—their own new clause, drafted, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywod has said, by their lawyers, not by us, and supposedly given in good faith to be honoured by the city council.

After all the discussions had taken place, the city council transferred £500,000 to the road race account for the 1986 race and £550,000 for the 1987 race.

It has been said that there is no difference between the city council choosing to spend money on the road race to promote tourism and choosing to spend it in some other

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way to promote tourism. I understand that point. If the city council had decided to spend money on promoting tourism and believed that the road race was a good vehicle for doing so rather than books of matches, posters or newspaper advertisements, I might have had some sympathy with its point of view, but that was not what happened.

The city council had overspent on the promotion of tourism in the financial year 1986-87. It did not transfer money from the promotion of tourism account to the road race account; it just reclassified the deficit. It simply said that instead of overspending by a few thousand pounds on the promotion of tourism, it would overspend by that, plus another £500,000. It was a fiddle. To my constituents it looks like cheating. It was not a case of using money; the council just reclassified the loss in the accounts. It was a book-keeping manoeuvre, and it was not in the spirit of negotiations undertaken by Sir Reginald Eyre.

At that stage, the city council had not done its accounts for 1987-88. When they were published, we found that it had overspent in that year as well. Now we have the probable figures for promoting tourism for 1988-89 and we find that compared with its original estimate the council has overspent by £500,000. But it is worse than I thought because the council has transferred £600,000 to the road race account. For the current year 1989-90, the council has estimated for another subvention to the road race account of another £600,000. This is a bottomless pit. The council overspent on the promotion of tourism in 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89 and it has now increased its estimate for 1989-90 in order to hide the subsidy.

To be fair, the city treasurer assures me that he will transfer some of the money back. He will transfer back not £600,000, but £550,000, having ensured that the race makes a profit of that amount. He is hoping to do the same next year.

It is not only Socialists who have questioned the way that this is being done. At the statutory consultation meeting with representatives of industrial and commercial ratepayers about this year's budget—in particular, representatives of the Birmingham chamber of commerce —they were told that the race was making a profit. I do not accept that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath says that he is sure that it did, but on the basis of my discussions with the city treasurer I am convinced that, in the spirit of the undertaking given by Sir Reginald Eyre, the race has made a loss in excess of £1 million and there will be provision for further transfers in the current year.

It took the hon. Member for Northfield 54 minutes to get to that point, which he well knows is the objection that I and my hon. Friends have to the road race and the new Bill. The hon. Gentleman said that it was the proper thing to do. I do not agree. It is not proper to look for ways to sidestep an Act of Parliament when the city council is itself responsible for the wording of the Act of Parliament. The council could do it, but it did not have to do it. It was a policy decision to do it. It was legal, but it was not right, and it should not have done it.

It would not matter so much if the money put int,o the road race account had been surplus. It would not matter so much if Birmingham had no financial problems. But every Member of Parliament and city councillor from Birmingham knows that Birmingham has tremendous financial problems as the result of the Government's financial policies. Council houses are not being repaired. Houses in my constituency stood empty throughout March because the local housing department did not have the money to repair them, and people could not move into them. Schools are waiting to be repaired. Roofs are leaking in nursery, infant, junior and secondary schools in my constituency. There is a shortage of occupational therapists. People with severe disabilities are classed by their doctors as in need of having their homes adapted. Such people are waiting not weeks but months to be visited by an occupational therapist, and even longer for the adaptations that are required.

In August last year the city council stopped issuing bus passes to people with disabilities because it had run out of money. In fact, the city council had not issued any bus passes to people with disabilities, who had been assessed from April 1988 as entitled to them. It had taken the council from April to August to deal with the backlog from the previous year because it had run out of money that year as well—when it was subsidising a motor race.

I challenge the order of priorities of the city council. I accept that a motor race creates jobs. The point is that all the other things that I mentioned would also create jobs. If money is spent on repairs to council houses, on occupational therapists, or on repairing the leaking roofs of schools, jobs are created. If bus passes are provided for people with disabilities, that provides jobs for bus drivers. The question is: what are the council's priorities?

It is significant that the 1985 Act was introduced by a Conservative Member of Parliament, and that this Bill has been introduced by another Conservative. The priorities are Conservative priorities; they are not Socialist priorities. That is why I will vote against the Bill.

9.10 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Peter Bottomley): It may be helpful to the House if I intervene at this point to give a brief indication of the Government's view on the Bill. As the House knows, the Government traditionally stand neutral in relation to private Bills where no major matter of principle is involved. That was our position on the 1985 Act, which authorised motor racing on the streets of Birmingham for the first time.

The Bill now before the House proposes some significant amendments to the 1985 Act. These particularly concern the number of days on which motor racing can take place and the length of time for which streets can be closed to traffic each day. Understandably, the Bill has aroused opposition from those who fear an increase in the disruption that motor racing must inevitably cause to the normal pattern of daily life and movement in Birmingham. Questions have been raised about the way in which the city council has financed the races held so far.

We have considered whether these are major matters of principle on which it would be right for the Goverment to take a view. We have taken into account the fact that none of the roads directly affected by the Bill's proposals is a trunk road. Birmingham city council is itself the highway authority for all the roads concerned. Our conclusion is that the issues raised by the Bill are essentially of local concern and that it would not be right for the Government to intervene. In the light of that, we have no comment on the instruction.

Mr. Rooker *rose*——

Mr. Bottomley: I will not give way.

Mr. Rooker: Why will the Minister not give way?

Mr. Bottomley: It is for the promoters to persuade Parliament that the powers that they are seeking are justified.

Mr. Rooker *rose*——

Mr. Bottomley: There are now eight petitions—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."]—remaining against the Bill.

Mr. Rooker: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. on 1 April 1985 the Minister's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), was more than generous in giving way to her colleagues in the House when she said:

"We have stated that we expect the project to be self-financing".—[*Official Report*, 1 April 1985; vol. 76, c. 980.]

That is what she said on behalf of the Government. What about the Minister——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. This must be a matter for the Minister.

Mr. Bottomley: Intemperance from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is out of place.

There are now eight petitions remaining against the Bill which raise matters reflecting genuine and widespread local concern. The petitioners will have the opportunity to present their objections to the Select Committee, which will be in a better position than the House today to examine in detail the issues involved and will have the added advantage of hearing expert evidence. In the usual, conventional way, the Bill should be allowed to proceed to Committee for that detailed consideration.

9.13 pm

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): I am an unashamedly enthusiastic supporter of municipal Socialism and I am in favour of municipal enterprise. I find it extremely ironic that my lifelong principles are being supported from the Government Benches and opposed from the Opposition Benches, but those of us who have served a long time in the House are never surprised at anything these days. I do not often fall out with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), but even if everything that has been said about the subsidy for the race were correct—in fact, it is wholly inaccurate—I should still think the road race worth while, and I am sorry that my hon. Friend seeks to oppose the strategy of Birmingham city council.

The Government's policies have brought enormous unemployment to Birmingham. I believe that my constituency has the third highest level of unemployment in the country—with long-term unemployment at 40 per cent., including much youth unemployment. It was for that reason that I decided, with the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Hodge Hill and others, to take on the job of promoting the Birmingham Olympic bid. Sir Reginald Eyre was also active in supporting that bid. The philosophy behind the bid was that because the Government would not solve the unemployment problems of Birmingham, we had better do something about them ourselves. The only way to produce long-term economic benefits was to sell the wonderful city of Birmingham worldwide and to attract enormous worldwide investment.

That was nothing new. That logic started with the national exhibition centre. Some of the arguments that we have heard today from my hon. Friend the Member for Hodge Hill are an echo of the arguments about the establishment of the national exhibition centre. There was an all-party effort, supported by the chamber of commerce, to get the NEC built at Birmingham. Despite all the Jeremiahs telling us that the NEC would lose money, it is profitable. I believe that about £12 million of profit now goes directly to the rate fund each year. Of course, the NEC did not make a profit in the first year or two, but it gradually gathered support—it has to be sold worldwide—and the profit that it makes now goes towards expenditure on all the things that my hon. Friend the Member for Hodge Hill rightly demands, such as education, housing and other services.

That led us to thinking in other directions. Some hon. Members will remember the tremendous fight about the NEC. We had a great success against the London lobby. I remember going to see the Prime Minister with my hon. Friend's predecessor, who did one or two things of which I approve, although leaving the Labour party was not one of them. When he was a more senior Minister than I, we went to see the Prime Minister and told him that regional policy and the attraction of investment to the midlands would mean nothing if he did not agree to the NEC being put in Birmingham. It is to the credit of the Prime Minister of the time, now Lord Wilson, that in our presence he signed a piece of paper saying, "proceed."

The concept of the NEC came from the city council, and particularly from two late friends of ours, Sir Frank Griffin and Harry Watton. In spite of initial losses and quite a lot of risk, the NEC is producing a profit of about £12 million a year which subsidises the rates.

That is why I support municipal Socialism. When I was a member of the city council I was the chairman of the civic catering committee. We had to compete with the catering trade on more than fair terms because we had to pay considerably more each week in wages. Nevertheless, we made a success of it.

I have always believed in municipal enterprise and I am saddened by the doubts that my hon. Friends have expressed about that concept. The great city of Birmingham has been built up on municipal enterprise. Chamberlain produced water, electricity and gas—yet the Conservatives first nationalised them and the present terrible Government are privatising them. All that enterprise came from Birmingham. Those are the ironies of history that we must remember. Birmingham is a city based on municipal enterprise. That is why the NEC has been successful. It is also why we are promoting the Olympic bid. We went all over the world and attracted great attention.

Ms. Short: It failed.

Mr. Howell: It did not fail. We just did not secure sufficient votes to get it on the last occasion. It is clear that my hon. Friend does not appreciate that the Olympic bid is responsible for massive investment in the city of Birmingham. There are people building hotels now in Birmingham and wanting to establish businesses there

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who say frankly to me, "Until we saw you going round the world selling your city, we were unaware of the city's attractions." Efforts of that type are cumulative.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): I was wondering whether the city had an economic development department. It seems odd that one has to have Olympic bids. After all, we cannot all do that. Perhaps Sunderland should have an Olympic bid if my right hon. Friend thinks that that is the only way to get investment.

Mr. Howell: I wish that we could have more intelligent interruptions. It should be obvious that our Olympic bid is just one of many ways to go about achieving the object that we had in mind. Other cities will adopt different methods. Sheffield is going for the world student games —and good luck to that city in its efforts.

Mr. Rooker: Sheffield is not going for them—it has got them.

Mr. Howell: That city will promote them. Perhaps we can now have some sense in this debate.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The right hon. Gentleman referred to municipal Socialism. Perhaps for the same virtues that he claimed for that argument, he will acknowledge that Budapest in Hungary and Moscow bid for grand prix to attract attention to their respective cities.

Mr. Howell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of that. Perhaps I should declare an interest in that I have been to the Budapest grand prix and seen the effect that it has had on that country. It has been enormously successful, and all credit to the organisers.

While on the subject of declaring interests, I have been to the Birmingham road race, but not as a guest of Birmingham city council. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr. I saw many of his councillors in the hospitality suite, but I am glad to say that I did not have a drink there. I do not think that my hon. Friend had a drink there either.

Mr. Rooker: My right hon. Friend is making disparaging remarks about members of the city council.

Mr. Howell: I am not.

Mr. Rooker: By referring to it in a perjorative way— *[Interruption.]* I am simply saying that we are making law. There are beneficial interests involved in the result of this legislation. They have been enjoyed by some hon. Members, who no doubt will enjoy them in the future. The point of my earlier argument was that we should make it clear to the ratepayers of Birmingham, who pay for the free tickets, that they should know that we know that, and that when we are making law we should say, "Thank you very much—the hospitality and free tickets are fine." There was nothing disparaging in what I said. I assure my right hon. Friend that the city councillors are a totally different kettle of fish.

Mr. Howell: There is nothing disparaging about accepting hospitality.

Mr. Rooker: It was the way in which my right hon. Friend expressed himself.

Mr. Howell: I was simply drawing attention to the fact that people were enjoying hospitality. My hon. Friend interrupted me as I was about to say that there was nothing wrong with that. It is sensible and reasonable to do it, and it happens to all of us from time to time. I mentioned it only because my hon. Friend asked us all to declare our interests. I was declaring mine.

Ms. Short: As my right hon. Friend was chair of the Birmingham catering committee, he will be aware that that department is now going through a redundancy exercise. Is he further aware that that department contributed £28,000 to free hospitality—free booze and food—for VIPs? I thought that that was wrong. Did my right hon. Friend think that it was wrong?

Mr. Howell: I was not aware of it, and I doubt whether it is accurate.

Ms. Short: I have the figures with me.

Mr. Howell: I accept that my hon. Friend has the figures, but I do not know whether the catering department, of its own volition, was providing the hospitality or whether it was performing a service.

Ms. Short: It did it of its own volition.

Mr. Howell: In that case, it was not providing it— *[Interruption.]* It may have spent £28,000 on food, drink and so on, but it must have been doing it as part of a service that it was paid to provide. I assume that that was the position. Catering departments are paid to provide services as the basis of their existence, but I will gladly look at the figures that my hon. Friend says that she has.

Mr. Rooker: It gets an income.

Mr. Howell: Yes, the department gets an income, which derives from various sources. I would be ruled out of order if I were to reflect on where we got the income when I was chairman of the catering department. It came from a variety of sources. By law it must make a profit, and it always managed to do that when I was chairman.

Mr. Terry Davis: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is anxious to have the correct figures. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) may inadvertently have underestimated the amount charged for hospitality. Price Waterhouse insisted that the city council include in its road race account an amount for 1986 of £45,515 for hospitality for guests, a sum that had previously been charged elsewhere in the council's accounts. In other words, the city treasurer wanted to charge it somewhere else and Price Waterhouse insisted that that would not be right.

Mr. Howell: I am glad that was the position because it enabled my hon. Friend to make that intervention.

Mr. Davis: Really!

Mr. Rooker: What is £45,000, anyway?

Mr. Howell: I will not be sidetracked by my hon. Friends.

Mr. Rooker: What about the teachers?

Mr. Howell: This has nothing to do with teachers, as my hon. Friend knows. I will come shortly to the main points that he and other hon. Members made. I wish to move

from the attractions of the Olympic bid to the question of the national indoor stadium which we are about to build in Birmingham.

I have not the slightest doubt at all that in the case of the national indoor stadium—this country does not have one—there will be a lot of objectors, but again, it is a piece of municipal enterprise which is in the interests of the nation. We hope that it will make a profit. Nobody can guarantee at the moment that it will, but it will do so if it is properly run, like the new national convention centre with 10 halls that we are also building, including hall number two—

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): And the costs are overshooting year by year.

Mr. Howell: It is a good thing. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood not want to attract people to Birmingham? Does she not want to get business into the city? Does she not want to do anything for the people of Birmingham?

Ms. Short: Certainly I do.

Mr. Terry Davis: What does this have to do with the road race?

Mr. Howell: It has everything to do with the road race. It is all part of the same strategy: that is my whole point. We are selling Birmingham worldwide by these wonderful concepts. I am sorry that my hon. Friends cannot be big enough, even if they disagree, to understand the underlying philosophy that is supported by the people of Birmingham. We have had figures to show whether the people were behind it. The city conducted another survey after two road races and there is still a majority in the area concerned in favour of the road race. That was shown by the public opinion exercise conducted this year.

This leads me to another point. I respect the right of all my hon. Friends to criticise the Bill, but I believe that the local electors are best left to choose local councillors to run the city. I am glad to say that, in the two years that the road race has been run, the electors of Birmingham have held faith with the Labour group in Birmingham. I am sorry that my hon. Friends are rather more contemptuous of that local democracy than I would wish.

Mr. Rooker: Of course there is a split. My right hon. Friend is quite right that local people are the people to elect the local authority, and the local authority is best placed in all circumstances to govern the area concerned from a strategic and technical point of view. But that does not give the local authority the right to come to Parliament and demand that we rubber-stamp its legislation. That is the point that my right hon. Friend has not taken on board. Nor has it a right to breach undertakings given in this place in good faith and accepted in good faith. No authority whether it be our local authority or any other, has the right to expect that of the House. If my right hon. Friend is not seized of that point he is not really entering into the debate that is going on here at the moment.

Mr. Howell: I am very seized of the point and I am coming to it very shortly. I do not know why I keep on giving way, but I try to be courteous.

I was concluding my opening argument about the philosophy and strategy on which Birmingham's enterprise is based. I had conceded that my hon. Friend the member for Perry Barr and anybody else was entitled to question the Bill, but I object to my hon. Friends objecting to the Bill in a way which suggests that their wisdom on these matters is superior to that of the elected representatives. That is what is happening—my hon. Friends are saying that, so far as the Bill is concerned, they know better than the Labour councillors in Birmingham.

Mr. Rooker: Who are split.

Mr. Howell: They may be split. We are split, too. If I may say so with great respect, my hon. Friend must not talk of politics in those rather juvenile terms. We are always split. I am against uniformity. The council was split when I was on it. The Labour group was split then, and we are split here. The Labour party is split. If we were not, half my hon. Friends would not be sitting here.

We must have regard to the facts of life. Of course we have different points of view, but I am entitled to put my point of view, which is that I am very sorry that in opposing the Bill my hon. Friends are not doing so entirely on the principles of the Bill but rather in the belief that their wisdom is superior to that of the elected members of the city council.

Ms. Short: That is absolutely wrong.

Mr. Howell: That is my interpretation of what my hon. Friends are doing.

Mr. Rooker: What about the arithmetic?

Mr. Howell: I will move on to the accountancy matters that my hon. Friends want us to discuss. I hope that my hon. Friends will listen carefully as the first thing that I have to say to them is that if they kill the Bill tonight, as is their intention——

Mr. Rooker: Here comes the blackmail.

Mr. Howell: I am about to make an unexceptionable statement of fact. It is certainly not blackmail.

Ms. Short: Yes, it is.

Mr. Howell: My hon. Friend has not even heard it yet.

Ms. Short: We know what you are going to say.

Mr. Howell: What am I going to say?

Mr. Rooker *rose*——

Mr. Howell: I am not giving way.

Ms. Short: Will my right hon. Friend give way.

Mr. Howell: No, I am not giving way.

Mr. Rooker: We know what you are going to say.

Mr. Howell: What I am going to say is that if my hon. Friends kill the Bill tonight they will leave the city with no income from the road race.

Mr. Rooker: And a loss of £132,000 a year.

Mr. Howell: I agree with my hon. Friend. That makes his attitude more extraordinary. We shall be left to pay debt charges of £135,000 per year for 20 years or more.

My hon. Friends have asked us all to be honest, so when they get the chance they will presumably stand up and say, "We want to saddle Birmingham with debt charges of £135,000 per year for 20 years, and no income —that is what we want to do with our vote tonight." My hon. Friends, if they are honest, will say, "We want the

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people of Birmingham to be saddled with this great debt." I do not. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nor do we."] I am pointing out what will happen if the Bill is killed. We are all responsible for the consequences of our actions.

Ms. Short *rose*——

Mr. Howell: I will give way for the last time, because I respect my hon. Friend.

Ms. Short: If we succeed in killing the Bill today, as is our intention, wish and hope on behalf of the citizens of Birmingham, the power to run a two-day road race in Birmingham will remain. The barriers that were bought with the money to which my right hon. Friend refers will continue to be used for the two-day event, so the blackmail that has already been used on us is dishonest. I do not accuse my right hon. Friend of being dishonest, but the two-day event can continue and the barriers can continue to be used. Killing the Bill will not close down the two-day event.

Mr. Howell: I am sorry to say that I disagree with that.

Mr. Rooker: The Bill will not affect it.

Mr. Howell: I am pointing out my interpretation, just as my hon. Friends are entitled to do. My hon. Friends do not want the proposals contained in the Bill.

The promoters say that the proposals in the Bill are essential for the future of the road race. The logical conclusion of that is that my hon. Friends do not want the Bill to be carried forward on the conditions which the promoters tell us are essential.

Ms. Short: They are not telling the truth.

Mr. Howell: I wish that people would not make such interventions. It is not my experience that officers and leading members of Birmingham city council tell lies. They do not. I advise my hon. Friends that, outside the Chamber, they had better not make the kind of comments about officials that they have made inside it tonight. That is rather sad.

The trouble with my hon. Friend the Member for Hodge Hill is that he has been hoist with his own petard. My hon. Friends the Members for Perry Bar and for Hodge Hill insisted on section 3 and the old clause that is now section 14 being placed in the Bill. Once they were in, the city auditors, Queen's counsel consulted by the city and the Audit Commission responsible, said that the accounts had to be made up in that way. They all offered that opinion and the point at issue——

Mr. Terry Davis: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howell: No, I will not give way for the moment because I am developing this point in answer to my hon. Friend's question.

Price Waterhouse, the Queen's counsel and the Audit Commission all said that in accordance with the Bill and section 14, which was forced on the Bill by my two hon. Friends who are now objecting——

Mr. Rooker: It was willingly accepted.

Mr. Howell: Under those terms, the city council had to produce these accounts on the basis of creative accounting. It had to account for the amount of income in the Bill that could be properly assigned to promotional effects. The city council then had to employ another consultant to assess the benefit of the road race.

Mr. Davis *rose*——

Mr. Howell: I will give way in a moment.

It went to the firm of Alan Pascoe and his associates, who have considerable experience in sports promotion. They were asked to advise the city on the beneficial effects of sponsorship of the road race for the promotion of Birmingham. That is where the figure of £600,000 comes in. My hon. Friends are continually saying that it is a subsidy, but it is not.

Mr. Davis: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howell: I will give way in due course.

Mr. Davis: My right hon. Friend is misleading the House.

Mr. Howell: I am not misleading the House—I am trying to correct what was said earlier. We are approaching the Division and I have a good deal more to say.

Mr. Davis: Will my right hon. Friend give way on this point? He has said that the council had no choice—that it had to credit the account—but that is not true.

Mr. Howell: All right, I will give way once more.

Mr. Davis: My right hon. Friend has told the House that three bodies told the city council that it had to credit the road race account with an amount for the promotion of tourism. He said that the council had no choice—that it had to do that. Those were his words, as *Hansard* will show.

I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the actual words used by leading counsel. My right hon. Friend said that the auditors, the Audit Commission and leading counsel told the council that it had no alternative. On being asked by the council whether it could credit the road race account—not whether it must, but whether it could—leading counsel said:

"A credit may be carried to the motor race account."

He did not say that it had to be carried. The council could credit the account if it wished, and it did wish.

Mr. Howell: I am afraid that I do not agree with my hon. Friend's interpretation. His entire speech was based on the city council's having behaved improperly. He has now quoted a QC's opinion that the council was behaving perfectly properly. We are quibbling only about whether it ought to credit the account or whether it may credit it. My hon. Friend has shot himself in the foot. I accept the wording that he quoted, but what the QC said was, "You may do it," and Price Waterhouse had already said that it should.

What is more important than what was said by Price Waterhouse or the QC is the fact that the Audit Commission said that the accounts had been properly conducted, and signed them. Those accounts have been audited and accepted by the Audit Commission. I advise my hon. Friends not to go around saying that there is anything improper about accounts that have been challenged and checked by auditors, the Audit Commission and Queen's counsel.

The race, moreover, is making a profit. The costs for the city in 1986 were £1,530,000 and the income £898,000, so in that first year the race made a loss. In the second year, 1987, the costs were £1,561,000 and the income £1,222,000. Last year, 1988, the costs were £1,215,000 and the income £1,215,000. The race has broken even in three years. That should be a cause for general rejoicing, and I am sorry that it is not.

The accumulated profit, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) has said, is now £469,000. That is the profit that my hon. Friends wish to destroy, but I do not wish to destroy it. Even if we take into account the £600,000 contribution for promotional purposes, of which my hon. Friends do not approve, the profit on the race this year will be £550,000. We are talking about £50,000 even if we allow their figures, which I dispute. On the clear evidence of the best cost accounting procedures, after three years the race is already beginning to become profitable. The elected city council supports the race and the MORI poll shows that the majority of those living in the area are in favour of it. I believe that the House should give the Bill a Second Reading and I am sorry to have heard such jaundiced objections to it.

9.44 pm

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I am proud to disclose that I am an adviser to the BSG group which includes Autolease, which has been described as the largest car dealer in the world. The company is based in my constituency, employs hundreds of Brummies, produces employment and motor cars everywhere and backs the commodities that go into the car race. I am also involved with PPG Industries which is based in the constituency of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), which employs hundreds of people and provides the paint finishes for most of the world's motor car manufacturers offered to bring the lead car from the Indianapolis to the car race in Birmingham, though this offer was not taken up.

I am extraordinarily pleased to disclose those interests because I believe that Birmingham needs the business that those fine firms generates, because otherwise there would be no profits on which to pay taxes or for us to debate in the House. There would be no money to allocate. The car race is an expression of what I believe is good for Birmingham. I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell). The right hon. Member for Small Heath made an excellent speech. He has always been a good Brummy and has promoted what is good for the city. I wish that his hon. Friends would take more notice of him.

I was elected to Birmingham city council some 30 years ago and I voted in favour of the car race at least 20 years ago when it first cropped up. At that time, the present leader of the majority Labour party in Birmingham, Councillor Dick Knowles, made an excellent speech in which he said that the car race will be like the Brummy, brash, noisy and boisterous, but nevertheless warm and welcoming. The car race has been welcomed by citizens and businesses in Birmingham and they want it perpetuated.

Prior to the promotion by the city council in 1985, a survey showed that 82 per cent. of respondents voted in favour of holding motor racing in the city and only 18 per cent. voted against. In January, a survey on the proposed amendment to the 1985 Act revealed that 76 per cent. of respondents thought that the motor race was good for Birmingham, bringing publicity and employment; 75 per cent. of respondents thought that the motor race was likely to improve the image of Birmingham in other parts of the country and abroad; and 58 per cent. of the respondents would not object to extending the race for three days, although 42 per cent. were against. Opposition to a four-day race amounted to 48 per cent. but there was a majority in favour of the extension of 52 per cent.

However, those figures take no note whatsoever of firms that are not enfranchised and cannot vote—the firms in the city of Birmingham which employ so many constituents of hon. Members on both sides of the House representing Birmingham constituencies. They are involved primarily with the motor components industry and would have voted in favour of the car race had they had the opportunity to vote. Birmingham is still a substantial home for the car manufacturing business, as is the west midlands generally. Those are some of the facts. The motor race is backed by firms and by the people.

In the 1970s and the early 1980s, during the regrettable economic recession which occurred in my city, the traditional industries diminished to a large extent. Without the implementation of service sector industries such as the leisure industry, including the car race and tourism, we would have suffered grievously. Some £500 million is now earned by tourism, including the car race, in the midlands. In the broadcloth of the country, the industry has employed up to 50,000 people each year. It brings about 16 million tourists to this country and we are told that almost 17 million may come here next year.

Ms. Short: The road race is bringing in those people?

Mr. Bevan: No, tourism, of which the road race is an integral part, brings in those numbers. About £15 billion comes in from tourism and helps to pay wages costs generally.

One of the wards in my constituency is near the national exhibition centre, which the right hon. Member for Small Heath has so eloquently described. The unemployment rate there is almost 6 per cent. less than in the wards that are further away. That is a direct result of the national exhibition centre, and together with the convention centre, into which £136 million is being invested, it will make Birmingham a tourist centre of immense interest. The road race is becoming a vital and axiomatic part not only of tourism, but of the success of industery generally and the motor industry specifically.

I was asked to say how much hospitality I have received. I do not drink and I do not smoke, but firms in my constituency, and many others, have hospitality tents in which they rightly entertain clients. I have had many a cup of tea and a plate or two of food, and there is no shame in that. The motor race brings kudos to Birmingham, and without the income that tourism earns, wages would not be available with which to pay bills. With those words, which I hope will be noted well, I rest my case for supporting the Bill.

9.53 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am grateful for being called and I am glad that you are back in the Chair, Mr. Speaker, because you have missed an

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interesting half Second Reading debate. I am the fifth hon. Member to speak, not counting the Minister, who was extremely neutral, spoke for about three minutes, did not give the Government's view and did not take interventions. I was rude to him, and for that I apologise.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I did not declare my interest. I bought a cup of orange juice at Birmingham international station today.

Mr. Rooker: The debate today has not been balanced. There is a case to be made for the Bill and a case against it. There is a case for substantial and serious amendment to the Bill, and until I was called, only my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) had the opportunity to present that case. In the seven minutes remaining, I cannot make the case properly. However, I must make it clear that we want the Bill to be debated as fully as possible. As with the previous Bill, the reason that we tabled our motion is our prime concern about the finances, which are at the root of the difficulties.

We saw a bottomless pit opening up with the finances and that was why the House, with agreement from hon. Members of all parties and on both sides of the argument, sought to regulate the finances in the Birmingham City Council Act 1985. It is because the regulations that this House wrote into the statute have not been followed that, with our humble non-accountant, non-legal opinion—the arithmetic is on our side—we tabled the instruction; that is partly why we wish to make a detailed case about why the Committee that considers the Bill should amend it in line with our instruction.

Ms. Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way because, as he knows, the road race runs through my constituency and it looks as though I will not get an opportunity to speak in the debate. My hon. Friend knows that I agree with him about the financial objection and that I share his criticism.

I should like to put it on the record briefly that the people who live in the area cannot bear the thought of a four-day event with all the attendant noise and inconvenience, and those people are entitled to have their views respected. Even the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan), who spoke in favour of the Bill, recognised that his poll showed that a majority in the area is opposed to the race. That is a second and important criticism—[HON. MEMBERS: "He did not."] Yes, he did. He said that only 48 per cent. were in favour.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point, and I wish that she could deploy her case on behalf of her constituents who are directly affected.

At the outset, I should declare an interest, because I attended the 1987 road race. Unlike my hon. Friends who have signed the instruction, I made it my business to ensure that I was in the city in 1987, so that I could witness the road race at first hand. Although I did not expect the matter to come before the House so soon, if it did, I wanted the experience of having walked the circuit and seen what happens.

I had a personal report from the police afterwards about the conduct around the circuit and around the pubs. I have never had to take any action on the report, because the road race was a peaceful occasion. I paid for the two tickets that I was offered, although there was a bit of an altercation when the officials said, "Mr. Rooker, there is no account for us to pay guests' money into." I said, "Well, the city of Birmingham rates fund will do for me." I paid for the tickets, but I did not contribute towards my lunch, and to that I extent I have an interest to declare.

I turn now to the point made by the hon. Member for Yardley, before he addressed the key financial aspects. Of course, my hon. Friends and I are all on the side of our city. Most of us were actually born there and are proud of it. Nobody who visits Birmingham today can deny that there has been a sea change in the past decade. There is a buzz and a hum in many parts of the city. However, at the same time there is also massive poverty, to the extent that the city council is setting up an anti-poverty programme, which is supported right across the city council. That is something that the council has never had to do or thought that it had to do before. It is important to note that point. It is no good saying that things are all black or all white or that they are all good or all bad, because there is no doubt that there has been a sea change.

I agree with most of the examples given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), who mentioned the national exhibition centre and the Olympic bid. However, the difference, which he did not seem to grasp, is that all those things give the citizens of Birmingham capital assets, whereas the road race accounts give them a revenue plughole down which hundreds of thousands of pounds of ratepayers' money are being poured at present and down which it is planned to pour even more in the future. It is no good my right hon. Friend denying that, because, as a percentage, more people in his constituency will be losers under the poll tax than in any other Birmingham constituency. When the losses of the road race start to be taken into account for the rate support grant—or the revenue support grant as it will be known under the poll tax legislation—the citizens of Birmingham will be doubly penalised.

I want to follow up one brief point about motor racing that was made by the hon. Member for Yardley. Of course there is a massive spin-off from motor racing. Most of the motor racing circuits of the world are dominated by British designers and British drivers. However, I have often wondered, how come the car factories in this country are not making racing motor cars? We cannot sell the motor cars we are making on the scale that we should be able to sell them if it was true that there is a fantastic and direct spin-off which clearly there is not. It is no good saying that, if there is lots of racing, we can make lots of cars, because it does not work like that. Therefore, there is a case to be made for——

Mr. Roger King *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the question be now put.

Question put, That the question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division——

Ms. Short *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The promoter of this Bill spoke for an hour. This road race take place in my constituency and my constituents have strong views about it. I have been here for every minute of the debate and I have not been given a chance to speak. I do not believe that it is right to allow a closure when a debate has been conducted in such a way.

The promoter of the Bill took a long time hogging the debate and you, Mr. Speaker, have only allowed one speech against the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: I have to take into account the amount of time spent on this debate. I have to say that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) spoke for 44 minutes. There have been some very long speeches.

Ms. Short: What about my constituents?

Mr. Speaker: I know, but the point is that two and a half hours have been spent on this matter and it is not the end of it. It is for the House to decide whether the Bill should be closured or not.

The House having divided: Ayes 153, Noes 30.

Division No. 163] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Fraser, John
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Moate, Roger
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhodes James, Robert
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Gilroy Bevan and
Mr. Andrew Hargreaves.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Clay, Bob
Corbett, Robin
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fisher, Mark
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McNamara, Kevin
Pike, Peter L.
Redmond, Martin
Rooker, Jeff
Short, Clare
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 145, Noes 24.

Division No. 164] **[10.11 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Corbett, Robin
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duffy, A. E. P.
Durant, Tony
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, John
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*

Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Moate, Roger
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Gilroy Bevàn and
Mr. Andrew Hargreaves.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Clay, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Fisher, Mark
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Redmond, Martin
Rooker, Jeff
Short, Clare
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time and committed.

Single European Market

10.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Francis Maude): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9756/88 on completing the Single Market and 10413/88 on technical standards and regulations; recognises that the Single Market will bring important opportunities and challenges for business and benefits for the consumer; welcomes progress to date on the Single Market and endorses the Government's strong commitment to completing it; and welcomes the Government's campaign to encourage United Kingdom business to prepare now for the Single Market.

Mr. Speaker: I have not selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken).

Mr. Maude: A year ago today, the Department of Trade and Industry launched its single market campaign. Its purpose was to alert business to the opportunities and challenges of the single market. We set ourselves then the target of achieving 90 per cent. awareness of the single market by the end of last year. We met that target well ahead of schedule, and now 50 per cent. of British business is taking action to prepare, recognising that the single market is already becoming a reality.

The need for this campaign is demonstrated by the progress report that we are debating tonight. The Commission was required to produce the report by article 8b of the treaty. It welcomes achievements to date in such areas as standards, financial services, capital movements, public procurement and professional qualifications. It also calls for faster progress in areas such as plant and animal health, taxation and frontier controls, and it stresses the importance of sustaining a rapid rate of progress.

The second report concerns the operation of directive 83/189, which is about preventing the creation of new technical barriers to trade within the Community and encouraging the production of European standards.

The Cecchini report suggested that the single market could create a 4 to 5 per cent. increase in Community GDP and nearly 2 million new jobs. But those benefits will not happen automatically. They depend on removal of all non-tariff barriers. They depend on open markets and a liberal approach.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): With the removal of the internal barriers, the textile industry fears that all the imports into the Common Market might come into the United Kingdom. That seems likely, in view of our huge balance of trade deficit in manufactured goods. Do the Government have any plans to ensure that there is a fair allocation of textile imports throughout all the member states, rather than allowing them to flood into the United Kingdom?

Mr. Maude: That matter will have to be sorted out in the negotiations on the multi-fibre arrangement which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, falls to be considered in the current GATT round.

We have shown here in Britain that deregulation, openness and competition are central to economic success. For Europe to succeed, it needs to follow the same approach, and we are winning the argument. The completion of a real single market, which was, after all, what the EC was originally about, is unquestionably in the British interest.

On the few occasions on single market measures where we dissent from the majority, it is where we favour the more liberal, more European approach; while some of our partners, who may make more communautaire noises than we do, stand fast for narrow nationalistic protectionism.

But a recognition of the benefits of the free market approach is growing in Europe. Last year, the Council of Ministers agreed a resolution which reaffirmed our commitment to improving the climate for business. It recognised the importance of small and growing firms and the need to ensure that their enterprise and enthusiasm are not strangled by red tape. It acknowledges

"that the development of the spirit of enterprise and the creation of new firms in the community must be encouraged".

It also acknowledges that existing legislation should be reviewed with a view to simplification. I stress that that resolution was a proposal by the European Commission which was supported unanimously by all 12 member states.

We can claim some credit for creating the climate of opinion in which such a resolution was possible. A few years ago, it would not have been. The same more market-oriented approach is seen in the field of standards. Old-style harmonisation has gone—the days of regulating every aspect of every product. Under the new approach to standards, we simply set the essential requirements—for example, relating to health and safety.

The specialist standards bodies then draw up the detailed standards to help companies meet the requirements. That new flexibility has resulted in agreements covering, for example, machine safety, construction products and toy safety. In that and other areas, we are making such harmonisation as is necessary a liberalising process, rather than a repressive and regulatory one.

In the past 12 months, we have seen key agreements on, for example, the liberalisation of capital movements, the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, the liberalisation of road haulage, and the opening up of public procurement markets. In air services, we are enjoying the benefits of liberalisation already, with new routes and lower fares.

Last Thursday, at the Internal Market Council, we reached agreement on a directive to remove barriers in trans-frontier broadcasting. Attempts by others to introduce rigid and protectionist provisions failed. The outcome is essentially flexible and liberal.

A priority for the future is financial services. We are discussing directives on banking, investment services and life assurance services.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Page 1 of the document on completing the single market says, in short, that completion of the internal market is the key not only to the Community's prosperity but to the Community's future. It is the key that will and must unlock the door. What is the Government's attitude to unlocking the door, and where will the unlocked door take us?

Mr. Maude: It is a somewhat cryptic phrase, but we agree entirely with the sentiment that the priority for the Community at the moment is completing the single market, and completing it in the sort of way that the

[Mr. Maude]

United Kingdom finds congenial. That is undoubtedly the key to unlocking a great deal of prosperity that is diverted into needless costs and restrictions.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that some people have found the key to the door in the Common Market? The Mafia has found a golden key and unlocked the door. When it shouted, "Open sesame!" It found £6,000 million behind the door. It is odd that the Minister should come here with a motion supported by the Prime Minister who only a few months ago was lecturing everybody at Bruges about the dangers of the Common Market. Yet she has signed a motion welcoming the single market, having guillotined the measure in the House. It is high time the Minister told us about the hypocrisy of the Government in trying to give the impression that they are against the Common Market when late at night, as on this occasion, they come along, with the payroll vote, to push a motion through.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman may find it remarkable, but it is possible to be in favour of some parts of a concept without finding it necessary to embrace warmly every aspect of everyone's view of it. It is possible to be against illegal fraud, as we are—more robustly perhaps than others in the Community—and still be in favour of the completion of the single market. The hon. Gentleman, with his detailed and expert knowledge of the subject, should know that allegations of fraud within the European Community, which we take extremely seriously, have nothing to do with the completion of the single market. The single market is about removing barriers to trade across Europe and nothing to do with providing funds.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): When he deals with the progress of the directive on machine safety, can the Minister give us any indication of how it will help free trade, particularly bearing in mind that it was considered by a Standing Committee for two minutes on 30 January, after it had already been agreed, and then passed by the House without a vote? As we know, it will add huge extra costs to the activities of small and medium industries. Can he tell me in what way that directive will further the interests of free trade in the Community?

Mr. Maude: It will do so by preventing those countries in Europe that might otherwise be minded to do so—in some instances they do so at the moment—from erecting bogus barriers to trade on the pretext of safety requirements. It will lay down that, if a machine meets the essential safety requirements set out in the directive, another country in Europe cannot prevent it from being marketed.

That is quintessentially what the single market is about. It is about preventing countries from erecting false barriers to trade on bogus pretexts. It will be effective in doing that. We have succeeded in achieving the bulk of our requirements. It is essentially a liberal directive, along the lines that we urged throughout. I hope that my hon. Friend will draw comfort from that. The suggestion that it will impose extra costs on small businesses is mistaken.

In respect of the financial services directive, our objective is to secure a sound framework of Community legislation that encourages competition and provides equal access to European Community financial markets. We have had strong objections to the Commission's proposals on reciprocity in financial services. We would like to see them dropped altogether, but the Commission's revised proposals, published last Thursday, are a real improvement, although significant points of difficulty remain.

We shall continue to resist attempts to use the single market as a pretext for the erection of protectionist barriers against the rest of the world. Again, recent developments are encouraging. Both Heads of Government and the Commission have reaffirmed the need for open markets.

The Community, after all, lives by trade. A policy of "fortress Europe" is simply not credible. Indeed, it would undermine the benefits of more competition and greater consumer choice that the single market is designed to bring. There is also a social dimension to the single market. It is inseparable from the economic benefits of more jobs, more choice and greater prosperity.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): In addition to the excellent initiative and effort being put into developing business advantages for small and medium enterprises in Europe, adding to that the great advantages that will exist for businesses trading in Europe under the single market, many companies that will not choose to trade in Europe will nevertheless be fully affected by the single market and by added competition from Europe. Will my hon. Friend encourage companies, whether or not they choose to trade in Europe, to carry out a full 1992 audit to discover the advantages, and in some cases perhaps the added competition, that they will face following 1992?

Mr. Maude: We have stressed throughout the campaign that we have run that the single market will affect every business in the country and that whether a business is now trading, or might in the future trade, in Europe, it will be affected. To the same extent that the rest of Europe becomes part of our home market, we will become part of the wider European market, so it will become commensurately easier for continental firms to trade here. My hon. Friends point is correct, and I hope that it is widely understood.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My hon. Friend will be aware of the Commission document entitled "The company approach to 1992", which expressly omits any reference to the United Kindom Parliament and its scrutiny process but refers to the scrutiny processes in other parts of the Community, such as the European Parliament and the Commission.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential not only that the scrutiny process in this Parliament is known at large, through documents published by the Commission —of which 50,000 have been distributed in this country —but that the Department of Trade and Industry should also make sure, as I understand that Department is about to do, that people know that this is the House to which Ministers and others are accountable and to which people are elected to represent their constituents?

Mr. Maude: We treat the process of scrutiny extremely seriously. The attention which my hon. Friend and his colleagues who sit on the European Legislation Select Committee devote to these measures is welcomed by the

Government. I hope that he appreciates the effort that we are making to bring these matters before the relevant Committees at an earlier stage in the negotiating process because the comments that the House makes are useful to us as we continue the process of negotiation.

I was referring to the social dimension of the single market and said it was inseparable from the economic benefits which would flow from the single market by way of more jobs, more choice and greater prosperity. We welcome measures which help to tackle the problem of unemployment—which is now greater throughout most of the rest of the Community than it is in this country—and measures which improve health and safety.

But there are those in the Community who want to impose new social legislation on us. One example is compulsory worker participation in the running of companies. We are not opposed to the involvement of employees and we have done a great deal to encourage it but the imposition of rigid systems on all companies in all countries is alien to all that the Community should stand for.

I am encouraged to know that I can rely on the support of many Opposition Members for the Government's robust hostility to those proposals. I note from the debate last week on weights and measures how strongly many of them object to the imposition of measures of purely domestic concern by the Community. I look forward to receiving, particularly from the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) robust support for our standpoint on this issue so that we may go forward on a bipartisan basis in opposing the imposition by others in the Community of alien measures.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): What evidence has the Minister that the system of worker participation which has been established in West Germany has damaged the efficiency of the German economy?

Mr. Maude: I did not say that it had. All I said was that it is a system not welcomed by companies here. Many companies, and all successful companies, establish their own systems for employee participation, but they are systems agreed by those companies in circumstances which are appropriate for them; and systems which are deemed apropriate by the German domestic legislature for German companies are not necessarily those which are appropriate in this country. I hope that the hon. Member will agree with us in strongly resisting this imposition. I can assure the hon. Member for Bolsover that we have not sold the pass but are defending it strongly—and I look forward to his support for our doing so.

10.40 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I welcome the opportunity at this late hour to consider the progress towards the completion of the internal market and also to consider the procedure for the provision of information on technical standards, but I must point out, as have some of my colleagues previously, that this procedure is inadequate and that a short debate such as this gives us no proper opportunity to consider the very important matters before us. Parliamentary democracy requires parliamentary scrutiny and we cannot have that if decisions are already made before we come to the House. Parliamentary democracy cannot be guaranteed if Ministers increasingly fail to make statements in the House on progress on specific proposals which are absolutely vital to our economy, as is now the case, and if other decisions in Europe are reached in private sessions, in private rooms, initially in the Commission and later in the Council of Ministers. We have an excellent example this week of discussions of this sort, which have been taking place on economic and monetary union.

I was interested to hear the commitment of the Under-Secretary of State to raising awareness in the country of the impact of the single market. I hope that all hon. Members will recognise that change must take place in a new, expanded market, and that our role in that market must change. Having said that, however, I believe that there is increasing anxiety about the Government's relationship with Europe. Is this anxiety not a direct reflection of the Government's own anxiety? And is that not itself caused by the Government's own failure to understand in time the true nature of the Single European Act—as I think some of the Minister's colleagues will point out later in the debate? Is it not also the case that the Government's belated recognition that 1992 means more than the free movement of City capital is something on which they did not originally reckon?

Montagu Norman, the legendary pre-war Governor of the Bank of England said that he employed economists to explain to him why he was right. It is obvious to most hon. Members that the Prime Minister must have consulted Montagu Norman's memoirs before she appointed Mr. Walters and her other advisers. It might be wise for the current Governor of the Bank of England to check his economic textbooks this evening to see on whose advice he has drawn in his discussions in Europe in recent weeks.

Does not this confusion and misapprehension about the Single European Act explain the hectoring and the blustering on behalf of our nation in Bruges not many months ago? Has it not made the task of all of us, of industrialists and of business men, all the more difficult in closing what is undoubtedly our Euro-credibility gap? If we do not do that, will we be able convincingly to press for reform in the Community? I hope that all of us would reckon that such reform is vital to our interests.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): I am somewhat perplexed by the Labour party's policy after listening closely to that delphically obscure passage about governors, past and present, of the Bank of England. Is the Labour party policy to support the views of the present governor of the Bank of England on economic monetary union or has it come round to support the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? One way or another, the Labour party must now make its position clear.

Mr. Henderson: The views of the present Governor of the Bank of England are interesting. I am not sure that those of the Chancellor of the Exchequer are as interesting. The Labour party's view is quite clear: we will consider greater monetary union in Europe when the time is right and we get an exchange rate with which our industry is able to compete in Europe. People who know about industry will realise that that is crucial.

Why have the Government belatedly understood what the single European market is about? We should hardly have expected the Government to agree with everything said by Mr. Delors, but we would have expected them to have a greater rapport with Chancellor Kohl. One can

[Mr. Henderson]

imagine the horror in some of the back rooms of Victoria street last summer when it was heard that, in his Hanover speech, Chancellor Kohl said that he agreed with most of what Mr. Delors said about the importance of the social dimension. I was encouraged by the fact that the Under-Secretary of State said earlier that he had begun to understand the importance of that.

The Government have a number of important obligations in relation to the completion of the single market. They have an obligation to inform our own people, initiate change in Europe on our behalf, represent Britain's interests in Europe and, crucially, make changes in this country, which are necessary in preparation for 1992. It must be clear to the Department that we are the least well prepared for 1992 of the major EC countries.

It is right for the House, in this debate, to examine how the Government have discharged their responsibility.

Mr. Maude: What evidence does the hon. Gentleman have for that assertion?

Mr. Henderson: I am happy to refer the Under-Secretary of the Tyne and Wear chamber of commerce, which referred to an article in the *Daily Mail*—which I am sure the Under-Secretary has read. Ten major exporters in the United Kingdom were phoned up in French and asked if they could provide an order for the person making the call. Seven out of the 10 giggled at the switch board and the other three cut off the inquirer. When a similar inquiry was made in Germany and in France—in English—seven out of 10 in both cases understood the orders.

The noble Lord Young recently told industrialists that they should buy a ticket for Brussels. Surely, one has to know why one is going before travelling. I heard what the Under-Secretary said about the cost of air transport and liberalisation, but that has not done much to reduce the charge between there and London.

Writing in *The Journal of Northern Business*—which deals with the area that encourages Fujitsu and other companies—Lord Young says:

"DTI surveys show that, nationally, only around one firm in three has begun to prepare seriously for action"—

that was in January this year—

"and there is no evidence that companies in the North are any better prepared."

An article in *Scottish Management Survey* stated in February:

"The principal anxiety, however, arises from the lack of preparedness which the survey reveals in the approach of Scottish managers to the challenge of 1992 and the Single European Market. A third of the respondents simply say that the event is 'not important'."

There is more evidence from the CBI. In its survey of 200 companies, 31 per cent. said that they had made no preparation for 1992; 3 per cent. said that they had opened sales offices; 4 per cent. had managed to open agencies; and only 7 per cent. had introduced new language training. I do not think that that is good enough.

Mr. Maude: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming the fact that since January—a date to which he did not refer until it was drawn from him—the proportion of businesses that are preparing for 1992 has risen from one third to half.

Mr. Henderson: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I shall be interested to hear the statistical basis for it in the morning.

Every dog has his day; does not every salesman have his? Is it not clear by now that the Secretary of State has failed in the preparation for 1992? He cannot even convince the friendly Institute of Directors of his case. Will the Under-Secretary now join his colleagues in expecting the boss to hang up his salesman's patter before it is hung up for him by his own boss? If the boss will not give assurances, as he cannot, will the Under-Secretary acknowledge that urgent action is needed if we are to inform and educate our business community? Does he recognise the danger of a hands-off attitude? Does he agree that an assessment by the Department of the likely impact in each industry is vital? I am sure that Miti in Japan would undertake such an assessment if it were in our position; indeed, it is undertaking one on behalf of Japanese companies.

Will the Under-Secretary make more resources available to co-ordinate the task through the DTI, as a matter of urgency? If he is somewhat weary of making commitments my colleagues and I may understand, although I am not sure that the business community will. I assure him that if he accedes to my requests it will not make him an interventionist; I am merely asking him to be an informationist.

Better information by itself is inadequate, however. The Government have an important obligation to engineer change in Europe. That is not only in Europe's interests; it is in ours. Europe cannot prosper as long as there is a great divide between the north and the south—or, more accurately, between the Bonn-Paris central axis and the most peripheral areas of southern Italy, Greece, Iberia, Ireland and, increasingly, many parts of the United Kingdom.

Some might argue that markets will resolve that division. Few in the Community seem to believe that, although there are some in Whitehall who do. Few believe that the poorer regions can achieve growth without strong regional policy, that skill levels can be raised without strong social policy or that infrastructure can be improved without intervention expenditure. Few in our textile industry, in regions already referred to, believe that they have any future without intervention in trade through the multifibre arrangement—and also intervention in this country to modernise plant and product and bring marketing to a standard that would allow it to compete principally in Europe. Few would argue that those objectives and others can be achieved without greater European public expenditure.

We should be taking the lead in those matters, in our own interests and in the interests of the Community. We should learn from others. We should learn from the Germans that public expenditure is worth while and can be justified to improve the private sector and that intervention is necessary if education standards are to be raised, training is to be improved and research and development is to reach the necessary standards. Perhaps then we would reach the standards of product development achieved by the Germans and take the lead in introducing some of the most important proposals, such as the three-way catalytic converter for vehicle exhausts, the new standards in ventilating equipment and the new environmentally safe batteries which will be a key issue in the coming months.

Perhaps it is possible to prosper without intervention domestically or with a social dimension in the EC, although I doubt that. But it is surely impossible for Britain to prepare for 1992 with such an overvalued currency. Industrialists throughout the country, including the CBI, tell us regularly that the one factor which destroys our ability to export is the exchange rate. Will the Government face up to the fact that it makes no sense for one of the weakest manufacturing nations in the EC to have one of the most overvalued currencies? That is a recipe for industrial devastation now, further problems in 1992 and even more severe difficulties if the proposals discussed by the governors of the European banks ever reach the political agenda.

The noble Lord Young may crawl to the recalcitrants in the Institute of Directors, saying that the abolition of exchange controls, the freeing of international road haulage or the freeing of non-life insurance shows that 1992 really means deregulation. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs will be wiser than that and will agree with the manufacturing industry in Britain and in Europe that intervention is necessary to secure common high-technical standards, the best product design, structural changes in industry and the highest standards of environmental protection and safety.

To date, only 108 of the 279 proposals have achieved a common position. We shall face difficult issues in future, such as animal and plant controls, fiscal change, border controls and the movement of people, which are all vital to our future. The challenge to Britain is to produce a European agenda, to take a lead in European standards, technical, material and moral, and to recognise that our macro-economic policies, particularly our exchange rate, is crucial in any European context. Our challenge is to acknowledge that if supply-side improvements do not happen autonomously in Europe, why should they happen autonomously in Britain. Our challenge is to realise that unless all those measures and others are taken, far from being a great opportunity, 1992 will be a great threat.

I hope that the debate will help to clarify the issues in the documents, but the Opposition cannot support the motion. I hope that hon. Members from both sides of the House will express their concern and join us in opposing the motion.

10.58 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): This is a very short debate on an important issue, and I shall say just a few words.

Everyone in the House tonight will probably agree that free trade in Europe would benefit the United Kingdom and Europe. Our massive balance of trade deficit with Europe suggests that free trade and the removal of artificial restraints and bureaucratic controls, particularly in Germany and to a lesser extent in France, would help us all. A real 1992, with free trade in Europe, would benefit us all. But we have to ask ourselves whether we are aiming for free trade, whether free trade will be achieved, and what is actually facing us.

What is happening? The Minister said that more and more people were aware of 1992. What worries me is that they are aware of something that is not going to happen at all. I can give many examples. I had the pleasure of attending a recent conference of the print industry and paper manufacturers. They were talking about 1992 and the great opportunities of the new changes. I asked all 160 people, including company chairmen, managing directors and accountants, whether they knew of any proposal in the 1992 measures designed for printing or books. I said, "You are the people who know—I don't. You are the company chairmen and managing directors, and you have paid a lot of money to come to a great conference and everyone is delighted with it. Do you know of any proposal that will help your industry?" I did not receive one response, and I know of none, save the possible imposition of VAT on newspapers and books.

The Minister talked about insurance services. I am a director of an insurance company and I have been to lunch with people from many insurance companies. We hear constantly about the glorious new opportunities for insurance freedom in 1992, but I must ask the Minister what those opportunities are. I have read the directives with great care and we have studied them at board meetings, with experts submitting reports, but the only proposal for non-life insurance seems to be for a limited degree of freedom in what are known as large risks. That means that our company might have the opportunity to insure the Eiffel tower, if the French agreed. However, that freedom might not materialise, due to the rule put into the proposals by the Commission at the last minute to the effect that if a company can offer a suitable insurance service it can keep the other lot out. My insurance company—and two other leading insurance companies of which I am aware—thus came to the conclusion that there is no liberalisation in the proposals.

When one considers particular industries, it is nonsense to say, "Please prepare for 1992." Looking at the proposals, it is clear that free trade is not on the way. Sadly, the measures that we have considered to date have largely been matters of little significance. Sadly, too, there are major problems. Does my hon. Friend the Minister seriously think that we can have free trade in 1992 unless we sort out the inner German trade agreement? He will be well aware that the country with which we have the worst balance of payments deficit is Germany. He must be aware from reading Community documents that the position is disastrous.

In the reports about food aid, for example, we find that there were massive complaints last year about food contaminated by radioactivity, which apparently came from eastern Europe. My hon. Friend must be aware that trade is flowing in from East europe to East Germany and to West Germany under the inner German trade agreement. The only people who can control the trading conditions are the West German Government. We are all aware that trade is flowing from eastern Europe to Germany.

The Minister may think that that is a silly point, but let him go and speak to the textile industry or to the people working in the knitted goods industry. They have plenty of documents on the matter. I have one here from the Apparel, Knitting and Textile Alliance, which is clearly terrified that the alleged single European market will simply mean that east European goods will pour in. What can my hon. Friend do about that? We have put particular cases to him, but we are told that it is the German Government who determine that a certain percentage of value must be added before goods can come out of West Germany. What on earth can we do about that, and what is already being done?

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

I want to ask my hon. Friend about the interpretation and application of free trade. We have already had one or two minor free trade measures for which we should be delighted, such as one on buses. I appeal to my hon. Friend to come to Southend and ask people at the airport how they get on with the free trade in buses. The Minister should consult the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and his own Department. He will know that, although our right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary met Mr. Genscher, although our right hon. Friend the Minister of State took proceedings, and although I took a group of Southend councillors to West Germany with the help of our ambassador in Bonn, sadly, nothing happened. Before the Minister goes ahead with more of this massive timetable, I plead with him when talking of the glorious opportunities to ask whether those opportunities really exist or are being planned.

I hope that the Government will also consider what other countries think about "fortress Europe". I was in America last week and met many people in business there. Some firms, such as Ford and Du Pont say, "Don't stir things up—we're in Europe and we want to make sure that we don't stir things up unnecessarily and bring out any anti-American feeling there." If the Minister were to talk to those engaged in trade, however, he would find that when they consider the proposals—there is some element of protectionism in all of them—they are concerned that the proposals seem specifically designed to try to keep out foreign trade. If the Minister has any doubts about that, he should talk to those who export computer chips because there are new proposals about the basis of organisation and about where research and development must come.

The Minister should also talk to the American banks. He will know that in America there is a system of national treatment whereby foreign banks have to have the same facilities and the same rights as United States banks. But that is not what "reciprocity" means, as my hon. Friend the Minister must be well aware. This is something entirely new, which will be protectionism in banking. If he doubts that, he should ask the Bank of America and its vice-president, Mr. Coleman.

Mr. Maude: I am sure that my hon. Friend has seen the Commission's new proposals on reciprocity, which were issued on Thursday last week and which specifically refer to national treatment.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend must be well aware that the document, which I have with me in this pile of documents, states that the question of reciprocity can be referred to the Commission for interpretation. We know that the Minister and the Common Market have, on a number of occasions, given many specific assurances. Does my hon. Friend recall Ministers coming to the House time and time again to say, for example, how delighted they were that in 1987 agricultural spending increased by only 3·7 per cent. but the Court of Auditors' report shows that that was achieved by accountancy fiddles and that the real figure was 24 per cent. If my hon. Friend doubts that, he should come to Southend and talk to our bus company.

Mr. Maude: I am not quite sure where my hon. Friend's last point takes us, as it seems to lead into a wholly different area. On his point about reciprocity, the Commission's new proposals specifically state that the Commission would have powers to act against other countries' banks seeking authorisation in the Community only if they did not offer national treatment to EC banks seeking authorisation there. As I said, that point has met many of the existing anxieties, and although it does not meet all our concerns, it goes a considerable way towards doing so.

Mr. Taylor: I should be delighted if that were so, but on the basis of my discussions last week with American banks and on the basis of speeches made by them on the basis of what had been agreed, I can tell the Minister that they are still acutely concerned that when it comes to the assessment of reciprocity and the question of the national agreement, it is the Community as a whole that will be considered by the Commission, not individual member states. Am I right?

Mr. Maude: I stress again that the new proposals were only announced on Thursday, so the banks to which my hon. Friend properly spoke last week will not have been aware of this radically new set of proposals.

Mr. Taylor: I hope that the situation is indeed so dramatically changed, but my understanding was that the assessment of the national situation was on the basis of the group of Community countries as opposed to individual member states. I ask the Minister, what is the need for that in any event, and if it is not a problem, why is everybody so concerned about it? Let the Minister talk to the chairman of Millipore, who has said that trading with Europe is difficult now—but that after 1992 it will become much worse.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider another important point. What on earth will be the position of the rules being imposed on us, which will create massive problems? For example, how will this country benefit from the tax harmonisation to which he referred? I refer especially to the harmonisation of taxation on alcohol and tobacco, on which the Government claim that we still have a measure of unanimity although, as he well knows, the European Court can overturn that by taking action. If my hon. Friend doubts that, let him look back to the speeches by Labour Treasury Ministers at the time of the sixth directive, which stated that all our zero rates were safe —yet six have now been overturned by the European Court.

The Minister will be aware that the assessment of the Health Department, according to an answer given in Parliament on 18 May last year, was that if the proposals were implemented, the consumption of alcoholic beverages would be increased by between 10 and 35 per cent. and of tobacco by between 5 and 20 per cent. but, more importantly, that the Government would lose revenue of exactly £3 billion, which would have to be made up in other ways.

The Minister also said that the Mafia issue and fraud were completely apart from the issue of 1992 and free trading. He said that with conviction, as though it was absolutely clear. I appeal to him to contact Giovanni Falgone, Sicily's leading anti-Mafia magistrate, who said specifically in a speech, reported in the *Financial Times* on 24 February that one of the least desirable benefits of a European single market would be to facilitate the export of Mafia crime from Sicily under the guise of apparently respectable business operations.

My hon. Friend should not under-estimate the extent of Mafia involvement in the EEC. He will be aware that the House of Lords has said that about £100 million per week is being spent on fraud. He will know that I have repeatedly asked his Department and others what action was taken on the clear example of the 19 million lira paid to the Mafia by the EEC for the non-delivery of non-existent fruit juice to NATO headquarters in Palermo. I have asked that question year after year since it occurred and I have asked about many other examples, but nothing has happened and no information has been forthcoming. If my hon. Friend the Minister thinks that there is no connection between fraud and the Mafia, perhaps he will consult those who seem to specialise in the matter.

My real worry is that in the Council of Ministers we are not able to control matters easily. I should like to ask the Minister about the control of firearms and immigration. The Minister will know that there is a proposal shortly to come before the Council of Ministers about mutual recognition of firearm certificates, which would mean that I could obtain a gun—perhaps a kalashnikov—in Sicily or Greece and then come to London and wander around with it. I understand that the Government oppose that and believe that it will undermine their firearm controls and and basis of the open frontiers.

There is a dispute, because the Commission appears to take the view that that should be decided by a majority vote and the Government take the view that it should be decided by unanimity. I ask the Minister what precise powers we have in that connection. My understanding from previous such occurrences is that, unless the Members of the Council of Ministers unanimously decide to reject the advice of the Commission, there is effectively nothing that we can do about it, apart from seeking to go to the European Court, perhaps three years later, which would not achieve a great deal.

I believe that that point is also relevant to immigration. We shall take a strong view on immigrants from Hong Kong after we hand over the country to the Communist Chinese, but what about the situation of the nearby Portuguese colonies which are classified as the overseas territories of Portugal and places such as French Guiana, which are classified as overseas territory of France? I suggest that the relationship of open frontiers could have an adverse effect on us.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: The main question is whether the Minister is really convinced that we are facing up to the real issue of free trade and not just going through a lot of silly nonsense on the various proposals that have come forward so far. I had the pleasure of having a long discussion with a civil servant, who had spent more than a year going backwards and forwards to and from Brussels engaged in the harmonisation of a proposal on clinical thermometers. His professional opinion was that there never had been any problem with clinical thermometers. I cannot see any problem that could emerge from clinical thermometers, but there was a real intention and a real need to get what was alleged to be a common standard.

When we consider the proposals for the noise levels of tower cranes, the regulations for the protection of hotels against fire, the recent modification of the lawn mower harmonisation of noise emission standards regulations and the hygiene conditions of fish—all of which I am sure are important to fish, to lawn mowers and to power cranes —I wonder whether we are really making progress on the real issues of free trade.

If the Minister has any doubts about this, he should think about insurance and banking, which matter a great deal to us. He should consider the implementation of the proposals. Before the Government go ahead and spend a lot more money seeking to persuade businesses of the unique opportunities open to them from a single market, they should try to establish—to some reasonable satisfaction—that the single market is likely to be created.

Sadly, I believe that the single market will not happen, although I wish it would, as it would be good for British business. I believe that we shall simply burden ourselves with a pile of rather foolish bureaucratic measures. We shall not solve the true problems of the EEC, such as the common agricultural policy and inability to control finance. Although it would be grand to say that we are moving towards free trade, sadly I believe that we are simply moving more and more towards protectionism and towards high expenditure, instead of the kind of liberality and freedom that Conservatives would choose.

11.15 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) brings a great deal of information and the fruits of much inquiry to our debates. His logic, however, sometimes deserts him.

The hon. Gentleman has argued that 1992 will create a problem because holders of passports from Macao will be able to enter this country more easily after the abolition of border controls. The problem that the hon. Gentleman describes exists now. The border controls make no difference. The holder of a Portuguese passport issued in Macao is entitled to enter this country now. The disparity between the inhabitants of Macao and those of Hong Kong is of the Government's making and is not changed in any way by the arrival of 1992.

The hon. Gentleman argued that the progress towards the single market is almost non-existent, and he outlined a number of areas where the conditions are less than ideal. He then argued that 1992 will open up a vast range of new opportunities for the Mafia to clean up. The hon. Gentleman has ignored the fact that the single market does not involve the disbursement of funds, which is where fraud has occurred. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways—either the single market will make a difference or it will make no significant difference and therefore will not open up new opportunities for fraud.

Mr. Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman did not give way to me, so I do not feel obliged to give way to him. I attempted to intervene earlier to make my point.

The fact that we are debating now, at great length, making a reality of the single market, is a criticism of how the Community has developed. The essence of the creation of the Community was that it should be a single market —that is why it was called the Common Market. Wider political, social and strategic functions were in the minds of the founders of the Community, with the Common Market as its base.

The immediate advantage derived from a large market comparable to that of the United States sold the idea of the Community to many people in Britain. That we should

[Mr. Beith]

have to set a target date to achieve some of the goals espoused at the Community's creation is a source of disappointment. Lord Cockfield, who is now in such bad odour with No. 10, played a large part in erecting 1992 as the target for achieving what should have been done years ago and thus to clear the way to free trade.

We often do not understand that the creation of common standards is necessary to bring down trade barriers. In that way, we will get away from the problem of another European country denying access to goods, on the grounds that they do not meet the required standard.

It is even more important to establish common standards now that concern about the environmental effects of products is so much greater. That concern has led to more and more necessary pressure for tighter standards. If those standards are not common throughout Europe, they will act as a restraint on trade. We might end up imposing conditions on our manufacturers which, desirable in themselves, may not have to be met by other European manufacturers. As a consequence, our manufacturers will suffer. It is of urgent importance that such common standards are achieved. In the course of achieving that goal, however, the Government have not killed the bogey of unnecessary harmonisation.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Given that this country sometimes has higher standards governing health, safety or consumer protection, it is particularly in our interests that such standards should be harmonised, since otherwise our producers will be undercut in any free trade area—of which my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) is in favour—by competition from the continent. That applies to manufacturing, where health, safety or environmental standards may be higher in this country, and also applies very much to financial services, a matter of legitimate concern to all parts of this House because it is a major British industry and one where we have very high standards of consumer protection, so it is particularly important that we are not undercut from the Continent by the lack of harmonisation.

Mr. Beith: I agree entirely with that view. It cuts both ways. Our standards are not always higher, whether one looks at some aspects of financial services or pollution standards in cars. We have not always been in the lead, but in some fields we are and have been, and we have a particular interest in ensuring that our standards are also required elsewhere.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Beith: I have just taken a rather long intervention, and I must make progress in what is a short debate. I know that other Members are seeking to take part.

I was about to say that the Government have not entirely killed off the bogey of unnecessary and pettifogging harmonisation in areas where it is not essential. A number of us were last week exchanging arguments with the Minister about goods which are not traded across the Community, buying 3 lb. of carrots or 5 lb of potatoes. When the Minister was saying earlier that this Government were pleased that harmonisation would not involve the imposition of legal restraints on matters not relevant to trade across the Community, I think he rather overlooked our exchanges last week and the likelihood that shopkeepers will be prosecuted for simply giving customers what they want when they weigh out goods on the spot; petty and trifling things like that give the European Community a bad name and give the objective of a single market in which different standards do not intervene a particularly bad name.

I feel the same about much of the VAT harmonisation. I was a member of the Treasury Select Committee when it produced its report critical of the VAT harmonisation proposals because, again, they are not directly relevant to the trading of goods between countries. Goods bear VAT in one country at the level at which it is applied in that country, and it is not a distortion of the price of the imported product that it is charged VAT at the same rate as the domestically produced product. That is another area where there can be an unnecessary degree of harmonisation.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman talks about what is relevant to the market. Does he not agree that, when we are talking about a market within one member state or a market across western Europe, market forces will determine which goods and services, and therefore that the standards on which those goods and services are based, will win in the marketplace? One does not need Eurocrats and politicians to make decisions on what those standards should be. If the hon. Member believes in a genuine free market across Europe, yes, let us have the free movement of goods and services across national boundaries, but it should be up to the customer within that European market to decide which set of standards will prevail.

Mr. Beith: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no, it is not possible to assume that the market will sort out standards when national Governments will impose differing standards across the Community. It is not sufficient to assume that the market can be left wide open to the exploitation of the consumers by the failure of producers to apply standards, particularly in matters not immediately apparent to the consumer, on quality, safety or matters which may not harm the consumer but may harm others when he uses the product, such as the emission standards in vehicles. So there are all sorts of reasons why Government action in these areas is necessary, and compelling reasons why that action should not be taken solely by national Governments, because if it is, it will produce different standards and restraint of trade.

There are other anxieties about 1992 and the single market, some of which we ought to be able to dispel. I was quite struck by an article which appeared in *The Independent* on Monday by Catherine Itzin and Corinne Sweet about pornography. They make the point quite clearly:

"EC deregulation in 1992 will open the UK market to European pornography."

I should be grateful if the Minister will comment on this in his reply. It does not seem to me that the existence of a single market will in any way remove the controls which we have in this country and in other countries on pornography and its distribution, and if it leaves any gap, we should do something about it.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Liberal party, which is the Euro-fanatic party par excellence. Does he not realise that imports cannot be

controlled without some scrutiny at borders? He referred to pornography, but the same argument can be applied to drugs. If we remove border controls, we remove scrutiny. We must consider illegal weapons and terrorists, but the Minister did not mention those matters, which are of great concern.

Mr. Beith: It is not true that there is no control over pornography, drugs or terrorism in the absence of border controls. A large proportion of the successful action taken against drugs is taken not by border controls, but occurs as a result of intervention within the country into which the drugs are brought. That occurs from tip-offs and detection work, not as a direct result of border controls. I am not aware of the balance in the case of pornography, but border control plays only a limited role in the detection of the passage of drugs.

Border controls do not stop criminals; they stop policemen and law enforcers. Who stops at the border? Not the person carrying the drugs. The police force stops at the border and must enter another jurisdiction and involve Interpol before it can take effective action across the borders. Criminals do not know these bounds. Where criminality is fuelled by vast sums of money, for example with drugs and pornography, borders are now of virtually no conseqence and are of little importance.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is correct to say that we should have more discussion about border controls and their relevance, not least with regard to entry to the Community as a whole. Much of what enters this country is making its first landfall in the Community. We could have a complicated debate about that.

Mr. Hanley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: I want to make progress, because I know that other hon. Members want to speak.

The Government's motion refers to the Government's "strong commitment" to preparing for 1992. Where is that strong commitment with regard to the essential investment which will be required in 1992 if Britain is to compete in the single European market? Where is the commitment to investment in links from the north of England, Scotland and north Wales to the Channel tunnel? Ministers have appeared at meetings and said that that is a matter for British Rail.

There are major strategic decisions to be taken in areas where Governments most legitimately and necessarily are concerned. The French Government have no such inhibitions about involvement in ensuring that investment takes place in transport links to the Channel tunnel. Such investment is very important for industry in the north-east of England if it is to participate in the single European market. We clearly need a sign of the Government's commitment to the single European market in that area.

Where is the Government's commitment to the European monetary system and to the other monetary developments referred to in the report produced by the central bankers yesterday? The EMS is the most obvious first step. The Minister referred to the financial aspects of 1992, but he fails to recognise that industrialists want a stable and satisfactory exchange rate from 1992. Indeed, they want it sooner than that. They do not want to be at the mercy of a rapidly changing currency level or one that is prone to unrealistic valuation.

It is clear that the Chancellor of the Exchequer privately shares most of the views expressed by industry. Perhaps the Minister does as well; I do not know. He is not allowed to take that view, because the Prime Minister says that he cannot. The Government are divided on a fundamental issue of economic policy which has implications for this subject and for many others.

An historic statement was made tonight. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) announced from the Labour Front Bench that it was Labour party policy that Britain should join the European monetary system when the time is right. I feel that I must be right, because once again I find myself in disagreement with both the Conservative and the Labour parties, which are in agreement with each other. I think that that is a new development.

Mr. Henderson: Will the hon. Member accept my correction—that we would consider the matter of joining the EMS if the time were right?

Mr. Beith: Of course I accept the hon. Gentleman's clarification. Whereas the Government will join the European monetary system, when the time is right—and we all know that the time will not be right so long as the Prime Minister is in office—the Labour party will consider whether to join the European monetary system when the time is right. Whether the words "when the time is right" refer to the time to join or to the time to consider joining is a matter for further clarification, for which I will not press tonight.

These are all weasel words, designed to escape a fundamental disagreement that now appears to exist between those two parties as to whether we should join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. I submit that that should be in that mechanism. I know that that is the view of the Chancellor, and he is in a ludicrous position to be presiding as Chancellor when he cannot implement it.

11.31 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): What is the future of Europe in the eyes of the Government and the Opposition? The Liberal spokesman, too—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—failed to tell us his idea of the future. The explanatory document contains what I call high-falutin language about

"the key that will . . . unlock the door."

Where will this door take us? Anybody who has been in the European Parliament knows that the door will take us to a federal Europe, a united states of Europe, a Europe in which national Parliaments have very little, if any, say.

The explanatory document says:

"we can stride confidently ahead into the new Europe which awaits us."

What is that new Europe?

Mr. Cash: It is not a federal Europe.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman does not know very much about the trends in Europe. He does not know about the President of the Commission. He does not know very much about the votes in the European Parliament. I advise him to take a look at some of those votes.

Let us have a look at the rest of this document. It says:

"we are all the guardians of the future of Europe. The people of Europe expect us to deliver. We must do no less."

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

What do they expect us to deliver? What are the Government telling the people of the United Kingdom they must deliver? The people of this country have a right to know. We have been told that we can make changes. The fact is that, when Europe makes up its mind, we can make no changes. When Europe has made a decision, this Parliament and all the other national Parliaments have to bow to it. That is the sad thing.

This document refers to a "truly European broadcasting area". It says:

"Such an area also involves freedom to broadcast, receive and transmit radio and television programmes".

Who will control that? It will not be controlled by Acts of this Parliament. That is the vision of the great Europe that is ahead.

When we come to the abolition of controls on persons at internal frontiers, we have a very serious situation. If the Commission approves a directive that a person is entitled to carry a firearm, and if someone gets a firearm, say, in Sicily, nobody at a country's frontier can prevent that person from entering or take the gun away.

The hon. Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) talked about the sort of scrutiny we are having tonight. We in Northern Ireland have suffered from that in our own legislation.

Orders in Council cannot be amended, and it is not possible to debate them properly. Now, in respect of Europe, we are into the same category of debate.

People should look very seriously at this matter. It is all very well to talk about a great, grand, new Europe and about doors opening. I should like to know what sort of Europe the Government envisage. What I have learnt from the European Parliament, from the European Commission's President, to whom I have talked, and from all the attitudes of Europe, is that they want a united states of Europe, in which they will govern, and we will be like a parish council with no real authority to govern our own country.

11.34 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I shall follow the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) in some personal remarks in a few moments, but first, in my semi-official capacity, I want to refer to the scrutiny procedure.

The Minister said how seriously the Government treat scrutiny. I shall believe that when the time given for debates of this importance is more than that allocated to domestic statutory instruments by a Conservative Government in 1951, who kept the House up all night when such statutory instruments were open-ended. That is a measure of the procedural slippage on our domestic legislation. That our debates on these important matters are still limited to an hour and a half after 10 o'clock shows the concern that Her Majesty's Government have for such matters. It so happens that not many hon. Members are here tonight. That is not commensurate with the importance of the topic. If they were, three hours would be a better time.

I am rather disappointed with the report. It is the halfway stage in the creation of a single market, and document 9756/89 is supposed to tell us what has been happening. Instead of listing 279 documents in an appendix, as I thought it would, it looks ahead at what is still to happen. We do not know how far things have got. There is no index tick sheet or list of where the documents have gone. We know that some have been adopted, some have been proposed and some are in the process of being discussed. There is no appendix to tell us how far that process has gone.

I now switch to a personal hat. I am afraid that Conservative Members are living in an area of unreality, despite the efforts of the noble Lord Young. We keep on referring to 1992. It is not then at all; it is now. It is by the end of 1992. The French refer to 1993, but it is happening now. If business men or Conservative Members want to know what is going on they had better have a look at the weekly reports of the Scrutiny Committee. I do not know how many Conservative Members read them or send them to their chambers of commerce weekly or whether those chambers of commerce buy them. We made 44 reports last year and there will probably be the same number this year. Anything up to 20 complex and detailed proposals and documents are reported on each week. That is what is going on.

Let me deal now with one or two definitions. The EEC is not just a free trade area. As we know, it is something far more. I shall telescope my remarks and my logic because this fills in what the hon. Member for Antrim, North was saying. With the abolition of frontiers, which is what the 1992 package is all about, the frontier is not definable. Until now we have thought of lorries and guns and most of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) made. But surely by definition a frontier marks a difference of jurisdiction—Britain, France, whatever it may be. We may not appreciate that, because if we go from here to Portugal we go to another jurisdiction via the sea. If the law is different from one side of the border to the other, the border exists. Ergo, the dissolution of frontiers means the dissolution of differences of jurisdiction and law. But over what area does that apply?

Recently I asked the Attorney-General to what areas of law the abolition of frontiers did not apply. I think that he said family and criminal law. There is hardly an aspect of life in Britain, whether commecial, industrial, specifications, standards of safety and all sorts of things, which cannot be within the scope of the single European market without frontier. Ergo, it means that our jurisdiction over these matters is ended—the point made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North—and we are subject by and large to a superior jurisdiction, that of the combined institutions of the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. If any Conservative Member wishes to contest that, he is free to do so, but surely one follows from the other. That is what the Single European Act was about. That is why the Government, who want to listen to what we have to say now, did not want to listen in 1986 when the Act was railroaded through on a guillotine.

These debates, important though they are, are only advisory. The Minister can go and do what he does at Brussels at his peril. It is difficult to find out exactly what he does. It is no wonder that not many hon. Members come to these debates even though they are shorter than they should be.

The Government are committed not just to that other jurisdiction but to economic and monetary union. As long ago as 19 June 1983, the Prime Minister signed the solemn declaration on European union at Stuttgart, which reads:

"determined to achieve a comprehensive and coherent common political approach and reaffirming their will to transform the whole complex of relations between their States into a European Union."

It may not be the united states of Europe, to which the hon. Member for Antrim, North has just referred, and to which the Prime Minister referred at Bruges. It is something unitary. It is not the united states of Europe because the states do not exist. It is one nation, a European union. Laws are made in a unitary manner. Of that there can be no doubt.

It is not therefore surprising that the latest emanation is the expression of the single market that we had in the Delors banking report yesterday:

"as capital movements are liberalised and as the internal market programme is implemented, each country will be less and less shielded from developments elsewhere in the Community. The attainment of national economic objectives will become more dependent on a co-operative approach to policy-making."

Hon. Members may translate that as they will. Later, it said:

"Although in many respects a natural consequence of the commitment to create a market without internal frontiers, the move towards economic and monetary union represents a quantum jump which could secure a significant increase in economic welfare in the Community. Indeed, economic and monetary union implies far more than the single market programme and, as is discussed in the following two Parts of this Report, will require further major steps in all areas of economic policy-making."

Hon. Members may say that we have not agreed to that. But we have, because on at least two occasions—at Stuttgart and in the preamble to the Single European Act—we signed a declaration that we are in favour of economic and monetary union.

As Mr. Delors and his friends, including in an individual capacity the Governor of the Bank of England, have said, this cannot be done without a central bank, one currency, a single economic policy and, of course, harmonisation of taxation. So it is not just a single market that we are in; it is much bigger. One goes with the other. It is something to which Her Majesty's Government, knowingly or otherwise, are committed but to which I hope that my hon. Friends and I are not.

11.43 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I do not share the pessimism that has permeated much of the debate. Many aspects of the single market can and should be welcomed, but I have grave reservations about what I have consistently described as creeping federalism. There is continuing evidence of that. There is no doubt that the European Court of Justice itself has a centre of gravity which inevitably will draw us further in that direction unless we do something about it.

I was heartened—this is one reason for my current state of optimism—by a recent visit that I paid to France with my fellow members of the Select Committee on European Legislation. It transpired while we were there, by coincidence—apparently following the lines that we in this country have been adopting in our small campaign to ensure that federalism does not take a grip—that in the French Parliament—in the National Assembly and in the Senate—Bills of Parliament were introduced to reassert their say over European legislation. Obviously, that say has been diminishing to a point when they could take it no longer.

I believe that we shall find that happening elsewhere in Europe. While, therefore, I am a supporter of the single market, for all the reasons that can be adduced—greater liberalisation of capital movements and so on—some of which have been under-estimated in a number of the speeches made tonight, there is now a great opportunity for us, through the national Parliaments of the Community, to make up for what has been described as a democratic deficit. The European Parliament—unless we were to become a federal state—will not do that.

It is vital that we use the fermentation process of debates of this kind to raise the awareness of the people of this country to what is going on in Europe. At the same time, we can alert them to the advantages of what is going on—and the reservations we have. We can then allow the democratic process to do its job. As some French senators told us, Britain is, in effect, leading Europe back into democracy through what we have been doing in this House.

It is indicative that tonight, while we do not have a full Chamber, there are many more Members in attendance at this late hour than there are for many debates which take place in prime time. I agree with the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) that a disproportionate amount of time is spent on the directives compared with primary legislation. We dealt with the second banking directive in about an hour and a half, whereas we spent about two months looking into the Banking Bill before it was passed in 1987. It seems, from what has been said by the Leader of the House and, others, that there will be changes in our procedures.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to what is contained on pages 13 and 14 of the report that is before the House, under the description "The prospect ahead". We find there descriptions that go way over the top of what is involved. For example, we are told that heroic decisions are to be taken to ensure that the internal market is completed.

This is, in many respects, a prosaic exercise with much at stake, and we must get it right. But I have reservations, for example, about the directive on health and safety, which no doubt contains much useful material. If a law is passed but not enforced elsewhere in the Community, that sets up an anti-competitive regime. It means that, whereas the Health and Safety Executive in this country is enforcing the requirements, they may not be enforcing them elsewhere in Europe.

When the hormone regulations were about to go through, we debated them in the House. We made sure that there was a debate before adoption. We should follow that principle—as set down in a resolution of this Parliament in 1980—in every respect.

There are great economic advantages in the single market, but there are distinct disadvantages if we are to go down a federal route. I say that with no apology for repetition. There is a centre of gravity towards federalism; we can and will resist it, but we will be able to do that only by taking effective measures in the House and in the country. Other member states will follow us towards that end.

11.49 pm

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) finished on a note that will command widespread support in the House. There may be those in

[Mr. Maude]

the Community who wish the Community to move in a federalist direction, and he asserts firmly, as I am content to do also, that the Government will resist such a move. It is quite inappropriate, and also quite unnecessary in achieving the real benefits that are to be gained under the provisions of the single European act. I can reassure him and others who have voiced such fears that the Government will continue robustly to resist moves in that direction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) mentioned firearms and frontiers. It is important to be clear about this: steps are being taken and work is being done on removing some of the inconveniences of frontiers for legitimate travellers, and it is perfectly proper that that work should go foward; but we have said repeatedly that the work should come to fruition only as far as is consistent with retaining proper control over the illegal passage of drugs, firearms and other things which concern us all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East referred specifically to the directive on firearms. He is quite right to say that we have opposed this proposal, as have several other member states. We shall continue to do so. Article 36 of the treaty allows restrictions on imports which are justified on the grounds of public security, and we shall continue to uphold our right to restrict the import of things which come under this heading.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to the free circulation of pornography. The self-same article of the treaty allows import restrictions justified on grounds of public morality. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman. We will maintain our right to impose checks at frontiers to control the movement of drugs, pornography, terrorists and firearms.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East also referred to the problems of inner-German trade. I recognise that there is concern about this. That is why officials of my Department have been in Bonn today to discuss with the German Government their control methods and their checks to deter fraud. The German Government put a great deal of effort into checking goods at the inner-German borders to ensure that goods are not being diverted from other eastern bloc countries. They carry out checks at factories in Germany, all of which must be authorised before they can carry on inner-German trade. They have taken severe action where fraud has been found, and people have been sent to prison for such frauds. For all these reasons, leakage of East German goods into member states is low, but we will follow up any specific cases which the hon. Member for Southend, East or any other hon. Member cares to raise with us.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed talked much good sense on this subject, greatly at odds, if I may say so, with what was aptly described as the "Euro-fanaticism" of many in his party. He took a practical view of what the single market can achieve. There are real benefits for this country, but we must not allow ourselves to be diverted—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

The House divided: Ayes 106, Noes 17.

Division No. 165] **[11.54 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Atkinson, David
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnston, Sir Russell
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Stephen Dorrell and
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Dixon, Don
Foster, Derek
Golding, Mrs Llin
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Kilfedder, James
Loyden, Eddie
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. A. J. Beith and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9756/88 on completing the Single Market and 10413/88 on technical standards and regulations; recognises that the Single Market will bring important opportunities and challenges for business and benefits for the consumer; welcomes progress to date on the Single Market

and endorses the Government's strong commitment to completing it; and welcomes the Government's campaign to encourage UK business to prepare now for the Single Market.

Transport Infrastructure (Private Investment)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

12.4 am

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): When I was first elected Member of Parliament for Wellingborough nearly 20 years ago, a local journalist asked me what I wanted to achieve as a new Member of Parliament. I replied that what was needed was better road communication. My interest in transport infrastructure was one of my first concerns as a Member of Parliament. Now, after 15 years as joint chairman of the parliamentary road study group, my interest has not diminished but has squared to the national scene.

My constituency, lying between the M1 and the A1, and with the long-awaited M1/A1 link to run just north of it, is crucially placed in our road network. Although much has been done to improve communications locally and nationally, problems are beginning to emerge. Congestion is not reducing, and even in medium-sized towns such as Wellingborough or Kettering there are increasingly long queues at peak hours every morning and evening. Any temporary hold-up on any major road can lead to considerable road chaos.

The really important roads, the lifeblood of our country, are becoming hopelessly overloaded. I have the misfortune to use the M1 regularly. Even when the M40 is completed, whole stretches of the M1 will be well over design capacity. It has now reached the point at which my constituents cannot estimate the time that they will arrive in London using the M1 because of the congestion and the fact that the most minor accident, or one motorist applying his brakes too quickly can create very long delays.

On the other side of the county, the A1 is totally inadequate for the purpose which it has to serve. It desperately needs widening and turning into a proper motorway for most of its length. Construction of the essential cross-country link, the M1/A1 link, has only just started, 15 years after the then Transport Minister, now Lord Mulley, announced the original scheme, describing it as the link that was vital to the economy of the country and for trade to the east coast ports and to the continent.

Our present situation and the forecasts for the future are not very encouraging. We have the most congested main roads of all the developed countries in the world. In terms of the average annual and daily traffic flow, we have the worst and most crowded motorways and trunk roads. Despite that overcrowding, car ownership per thousand persons is below that in the United States, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan and, perhaps more surprisingly, Sweden and Norway. But we are beginning to catch up. The economic success of the Government's policy and the real increase in incomes mean that many more people are buying cars and will continue to do so. Even the Department of Transport forecasts that there will be up to 30 per cent. more vehicles by the year 2000. The British Road Federation estimates that the increase will more likely be about 45 per cent. to 50 per cent. No forecasts show that there will be a fall in the number of vehicles on our roads.

[Mr. Peter Fry]

After the years that I have spent studying transport problems, I have started to ask myself what can be done to alleviate, let alone improve, the situation that we see developing. At present, the Select Committee on Transport, of which I am privileged to have been a member since its institution, is now studying the question of roads for the future. In instigating this debate, I want to make it clear that I do not wish to show any disrespect to the Select Committee. For some time now I have been developing ideas of my own based on observation and experience and I felt that I would like to express them before the Committee reported and before it took evidence on the private funding of the transport infrastructure. Furthermore, I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends will be preparing a paper on this subject and I was anxious to make some contribution before it was published. I want to assure the House that I have not used any of the evidence submitted to the Committee, but I hope to add a little of my own.

Before outlining my suggestions, I must emphasise that I have made two assumptions, with which not everyone will agree. First, I believe that there is a need for new roads because we have already seen the appalling congestion on the major arteries of the country, the M1, the M6 and the M25. That will continue whatever we do about public transport. Secondly, I believe that the Treasury alone will not find enough money to provide the cost of all that is needed. I welcome the increase in transport expenditure under this Government and especially the increase announced in the Autumn Statement. But, realistically, I do not expect sufficient extra resources to be made available to deal adequately with the problem.

Those two assumptions lead me to inquire what can meet the task if public money alone cannot. I accept that already private contributions to some schemes have been significant. Added value or access to a site can be of great advantage to a private developer. Many county councils have been able to obtain large sums to improve local schemes or to build new schemes. Similarly, there have been some large-scale private developments, such as the Dartford bridge crossing, the Docklands light railway and the Channel tunnel, and the Government are to be commended for encouraging such projects. However, as yet there seems to be no acceptable scheme for dealing with the problem of major new roads. The only proposal put forward so far on a major scale was by Tarmac a few years ago for the west midlands, and it was turned down.

The policy until now seems to have been that major road building in particular can be from only public sources and that private investment has been found too difficult to combine with it. I find that a little disappointing in view of the way in which this Government have brought about joint financing, whether of the city technology colleges, the urban development corporations or the renovation of our city centres. One must ask oneself whether there is a means of harnessing private investment with public expenditure to improve our transport infrastructure.

I suggest that before we consider any individual way of doing that, we must make certain provisions. First, no scheme is worth attempting unless there is a clear redefinition of the Ryrie rules, which will mean that transport budget expenditure is not reduced by the input of any private investment, otherwise no additional infrastructure will be made available to us.

Secondly, far more progress is needed to shorten the enormous period between the conception of a new project and its completion. Fifteen years is far too long for the schemes that we need to put into effect. Thirdly, I accept that there needs to be some degree of risk if private investment is to make a contribution.

What would fit those criteria? We should recall that the Chancellor is encouraging us all to save. He has announced a number of new initiatives with the intention of trying to ensure that less money is spent on immediate consumption and that more is put into preparation for the future. My right hon. Friend is lucky that for the first time for many years there is no competition for the need to sell gilts. The Government's—or the Treasury's—opposition to any other such scheme of investment, in competition with gilts, no longer applies. Why can we not use the principle behind the BEST scheme that the Chancellor has already developed, to obtain money for a new transport infrastructure? That idea could apply to a great many transport schemes, even to the high-speed Channel rail link that is mooted for the next few years and could also cover new Underground lines in London and other major cities.

In my view, a developer could attract a considerable amount of money, provided that the investment was tax-free. That would be a suitable initiative. The capital received from that investment could begin to pay for the project and initially would get it off the ground and pay the interest in the early years. Once the project was completed, the developer, whoever that may be—could decide whether to make additional charges which would provide revenue. Such charges could either be in the form of tolls or, if it were a public transport venture, in fares.

I do not think that the proposals that I am going to make are tremendously revolutionary, but money could be made available at an earlier stage than now to bring about many of the needed improvements in our road and transport infrastructure. Once the road is in use, I suggest that there needs to be public investment because no level of tolls is ever likely to be sufficient to cover the maintenance, the interest on the money borrowed or the repayment of the capital. There will always be some gap between what has been raised in tolls and total expenditure. That is why I believe that the public sector must be brought in. It is essential to ensure that any project is approved by both the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment so that assistance can be given in planning and early implementation. In other words, the scheme should be stamped as a "necessary" one.

Once the road is open, I see no reason why shadow tolls should not be paid according to actual traffic flows. That is where the risk comes in, because obviously not all schemes would reach their full potential at the same time or over the same period. The question of fixing the toll or, in the case of public transport, of fixing the fares, would be a matter of fine calculation. However, as the public contribution increases, so the loan debt could be repaid and eventually the road could revert to the public sector just as is planned for the Channel tunnel.

There are four advantages of this way of going forward. First, saving would be encouraged. Secondly, public spending would be delayed for some years. Thirdly, the

cost to the taxpayer would be considerably less than if the whole project had to be paid for from the public purse. Indeed, taxpayers would start paying only when they themselves were using the facility either as drivers or as passengers.

Fourthly—this is the most important point—the infrastructure would be made available much earlier than is likely under present procedures. The mixing of public and private finance in transport infrastructure merits further consideration for that last reason. For far too long —under several Governments—this country has been deprived of that kind of investment. Transport has always been the poor relation after some of the more obvious social needs—education, health and housing.

I give full credit to the Government, the Secretary of State and the Minister for at long last realising the size of the task confronting us. However, I believe that the situation is not standing still, but is actually deteriorating. I believe that the problem is such that—just as in dealing with the economy as a whole—the Government cannot do it all alone. The Government need investment from outside.

My proposals may not be perfect and may not be the eventual way in which the Government will decide to go forward, but I am sure that we must evolve some method of bringing private money into transport infrastructure schemes. If we do not, we face the danger that we shall not be able to deal with the increasing problems of all the modes of traffic congestion.

Failure to do that could be disastrous for our national economy.

12.20 am

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) on gaining this Adjournment debate. I have listened to his speech with great interest. I had already read the drift of his argument during his questioning of witnesses in the Select Committee on Transport. I agree with my hon. Friend on many points.

In recent years, the private sector has come to play a significant role in providing transport infrastructure, and the Government believe that that process can be taken much further. While the public sector will be the predominant provider of roads for as far ahead as we can envisage, we would be foolish if we did not encourage the private sector to supplement that provision, not least because of its enterprise and management skills. That is necessarily an evolutionary process, but progress so far has been encouraging. An important step forward will be taken when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State publishes a consultative document on private finance aimed at developing further a private sector in roads. As I cannot anticipate what he will say, I hope that my hon. Friend will understand if I am not in a position yet to say much about the way forward.

I shall say something about the story so far. The area where we have seen most consistent success has been the funding by developers of some or all of the costs of road schemes that can benefit their developments. There has been a fruitful partnership between them and Government at both national and local level. Since April 1986, developers have contributed about £12 million by means of agreements under section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 towards the costs of 58 schemes on the national road network. The pace is quickening, and another 50 or so schemes are at an advanced stage of preparation.

Even larger numbers of schemes undertaken by local highways authorities have been wholly or partly funded by developers through agreements under section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. Again, the scale of activity is growing.

In many ways, those successes have gone largely unremarked and, understandably, attention has been focused more on the big, privately financed infrastructure projects. The Channel tunnel is the pre-eminent example, but the Dartford bridge, the extension to the docklands light railway and the new high-speed rail link from Paddington to Heathrow are other examples where private sector finance is contributing to the provision of transport infrastructure. The second Severn crossing, the new high-speed rail link to the Channel tunnel and privately operated light rail systems in Manchester, and perhaps in Avon and elsewhere, are further examples of where the private sector may have a major contribution to make.

The Government are determined to move the provision of transport services, and the infrastructure needed to support them, nearer to the market place. It is only in that way that we can ensure that services are responsive to what the customer wants and not to what the centre prescribes. By progressively opening up to the private sector the opportunity to finance, design, build and operate the supporting infrastructure, we can also give full scope to entrepreneurial imagination and the sort of management skills that are not always evident in the public sector.

The question that my hon. Friend raised this evening is whether, as things stand at present, the private sector can be expected to make a contribution to developing the infrastructure that we shall need or whether we need a significant change in the present arrangements to ensure that private investment is readily forthcoming.

My hon. Friend has suggested that the time scales involved in major projects are such that private investors will be discouraged by the long pay-back periods. He has argued that, by offering tax incentives, we can expect the private sector to generate sufficient cash up front to get major private sector projects off the ground. He argued that, even then, revenues from the toll booth or fare box may be insufficient to remunerate fully the large sums involved. Therefore, Government may still need to make a contribution, perhaps based on the volume of traffic using a privately built road or passengers using a railway. I accept that pay-back periods can be long and that what my hon. Friend proposes may offer a solution, but I am not so sure whether the problems warrant special treatment of private investment in one particular area.

I would not want to dismiss my hon. Friend's proposals out of hand, but experience to date suggests the long pay-back periods of major projects may not be as insuperable a problem as perhaps my hon. Friend fears. It has not been a problem with the Channel tunnel or with infrastructure developments which have been firmly in the private sector for many years—Felixstowe is one obvious example—or a more recent development, such as the London City airport.

I do not accept the accusation made by some that we are stifling private finance. The examples I have given are enough to dispel such a notion, but I accept the need for clear ground rules on private finance within which the private sector can operate. To an extent, they are still

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

evolving, but some of the principles governing the introduction of private finance are unlikely to change. Most important—my hon. Friend recognised this—is the Government's belief that a privately financed and operated piece of transport infrastructure should be genuinely private sector.

The promoters must carry the risks associated with transport infrastructure projects, not the Government. The users of the infrastructure should generally reimburse the cost of developments—again, not the Government. That tends to rule out so-called shadow tolls.

There has been some misunderstanding about the Ryrie rules. They are designed to test whether it makes sense to undertake a project in the public or private sectors. If it is to be in the private sector, that is where the risks must be taken and any extra costs resulting from the use of private finance should be offset by the transfer of risk to the private sector. The Ryrie rules have not stopped a number of major privately financed infrastructure projects which might have been built in the public sector, but which were not.

There are some sorts of deal, however, which may masquerade as "private finance" of no benefit to the taxpayer. We are not interested in accounting arrangements which mean public expenditure by another name; or in arrangements simply designed to circumvent controls on public expenditure. We are not attracted to projects which require guarantees from the state.

There are other issues which I know concern potential promoters of private sector infrastructure. "Exclusivity" seems to feature strongly. In my discussions with the private sector, many firms have argued that the originator of an idea should have exclusive rights to it for a period; or should be financially recompensed if someone else uses the idea. Otherwise, so the argument goes, firms will be unwilling to spend time and money developing an idea.

I can see the attraction of this argument, and I confess that it has some merit. On the other hand, there are very strong arguments for competition. As my hon. Friend will recognise, it is difficult to square the Government's general commitment to competition with the case for exclusivity, and I fear that there is no neat answer. Nevertheless, it is clearly a matter of genuine concern to many firms and, even if we cannot agree to exclusivity as such, we must ensure that there is some way in which to recognise the money and effort firms spend on developing ideas.

Additionality is another issue which frequently comes up as a bone of contention, but I am not sure just how important it really is from the private sector's point of view, despite the fact that it is often raised. I suspect that it reflects the fact that many of the promoters or potential promoters of new infrastructure, particularly roads, are construction companies. Seen in their terms, I can understand why additionality should matter. Any construction company worth its salt will want private sector developments to be additional to the public sector programme because it means more business, but there is no immutable law which says that construction companies are the natural promoters of new private roads, for example. Indeed, to judge from the private sector generally, one would expect that not to be the case. The usual experience is that construction companies build what othes want and can finance.

I suspect that in time we shall find the same is increasingly true of privately financed transport infrastructure. Once we get to that stage, promoters will evaluate projects on their merits. They will no longer be seen as simply another opportunity for extra construction activity, and additionality as an issue will lose much of its force.

I should like to say a word finally about environmental issues. If ever we needed reminding about the importance which the public attaches to such questions, the reaction to British Rail's proposals for routing the new high-speed line through Kent has obviously brought it home to us all. It is difficult to over-estimate the interest which the public takes in the environmental aspects of new infrastructure developments. We of course expect the private sector to bring new ideas, but there can be no reduction in the environmental standards which apply to privately financed roads or railways. The public will demand that the same high standards apply as in public sector developments. So will the Government.

It is difficult to do full justice—I apologise to my hon. Friend for this—to the many aspects of private investment in transport infrastructure, particularly at a time when the Government are about to bring forward some proposals. However, the Government have, in the run-up to the new proposals, encouraged a wide-ranging debate over the last year or two, and have been pleased by the interest shown and the quality of the ideas that have been brought forward. Obviously, the Government will respond shortly to that debate.

I thank my hon. Friend for the very keen interest he has shown in those matters, for the opportunity for a debate tonight, and for contributing, I believe very valuably, to the debate with a most interesting and thoughtful speech.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 19 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Information Technology

1. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the balance of trade in information technology in 1979 and 1988.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Tony Newton): For the information technology and electronic manufacturing sector the United Kingdom had an adverse balance of trade in 1979 of £444 million. In 1987, the latest full year for which figures are available, the adverse balance for this sector was £2,226 million.

Mr. Clelland: Is that not a further example of the complete failure of the Government's industrial policy? Is it not time that the Chancellor of the Duchy and the Secretary of State got down to implementing a serious industrial policy for Britain? For example, will the right hon. Gentleman discuss with his right hon. and noble Friend the COCOM arrangements affecting trade with the Eastern bloc countries? If those arrangements were relaxed, would it not offer massive opportunities to British firms, mainly small firms, to export to Eastern bloc countries? Will the right hon. Gentleman do something about that?

Mr. Newton: In the light of the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks, I should point out that the deficit in information technology doubled between 1978 and 1979, deteriorated dramatically in the early 1980s, and since then has remained broadly stable. I invite the House to draw its own conclusions from that. On the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question, I draw attention to the many opportunities that British firms have taken and, perhaps most important of all, the obvious significance of the recent decision by one of the world's leading electronics manufacturers, Fujitsu, to come and do business in Britain.

Sir Ian Lloyd: In the light of the interesting report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on the subject, and in view of the fact that the rather regrettable deficit represents a large proportion of the total trade deficit, does my right hon. Friend consider the Government's response to the Select Committee report to be adequate?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State is meeting the Select Committee next week to discuss that very matter. The Government have given their considered views in response to the Select Committee report. There are some differences of opinion, but well over half the Select Committee recommendations have been accepted or are already the subject of action.

Mr. Stott: Is the Minister aware that last year the trade deficit in electronics was £3·9 billion—an increase of 15 per cent. on the previous year and accounting for almost one third of the total massive balance of payments deficit? In the past year alone, the deficit in electronics, telecommunications and audio equipment has risen by a staggering 40 per cent. In the light of those disgraceful figures, is it not time that the right hon. Gentleman and his Department addressed themselves to the magnitude of the problem instead of contemptuously dismissing the recommendations of the Select Committee which at least attempted to point the Government in the right direction to rectify a quite disgraceful performance?

Mr. Newton: First, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that, despite the size of the absolute figure, the deficit is a relatively small proportion of a very large market and represents less than 15 per cent. of the United Kingdom market. Secondly, as I hope that I have made clear, there is no question whatever of the Government having dismissed the Select Committee recommendations contemptuously. Thirdly, the most important single thing that the Government can do is what they have done with conspicuous success—to make this country a more attractive place for people to invest in and develop their businesses.

Manufacturing Productivity

2. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the growth in manufacturing productivity since 1979 *(a)* in Britain and *(b)* in other major industrial countries.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): Between 1979 and the year to the third quarter of 1988, the latest period for which full international comparisons are available, manufacturing productivity, as measured by output per person employed, grew by 42 per cent. in the United Kingdom. The comparable figure for Italy is 38 per cent., for the United States 37 per cent., for Japan 31 per cent., for Canada 28 per cent., for France 26 per cent. and for the Federal Republic of Germany 17 per cent.

Mr. King: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that those are truly outstanding figures of achievement by British manufacturing industry? Does he also agree that many overseas companies investing in this country are finding that the levels of productivity achieved by their United Kingdom subsidiaries are at least equal and often greater than in their own countries? Is it not a fact that the chamber of commerce in Germany has identified that as a major factor in investing in Britain?

Mr. Forth: Yes. My hon. Friend is correct to pay tribute to British manufacturing industry for its enormous achievements over the past several years. He is also right to recognise that it is the environment and framework provided by the Government that has enabled that to happen, and we should welcome it. We look for further improvements, but I believe that inward investment in

Britain, such as the recently announced investment by Toyota, Fujitsu and Bosch are examples of how the productivity record in Britain is now so good that it is attracting people here in enormous numbers.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm that the British textile industry is one of the industries that has notched up considerable increases in productivity? Will he also confirm that the men and women who have co-operated in achieving that increased productivity have not had a fair share of the increased wealth that they have produced? Is he aware that their low basic rates of pay have created an over-dependence on excessive overtime working and that it is time that the men and women in the textile industry who have contributed towards increased productivity received a fair and proper share of the increased wealth they have created?

Mr. Forth: Any judgment as to what constitutes a fair and proper share should be established between the trade unions, if there are any, and the employers in a particular industry. Employers will see that it is right that the terms and conditions they offer their work force have to be acceptable and sufficient so as to attract enough labour to the company to enable it to continue. We all recognise the great strides that have been made by our textiles industries and hope that they will continue, even against a background of difficult trading conditions.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: Does my hon. Friend agree that the vast improvement in productivity under this Government, whereby the average British employee produces 50 per cent. more than his counterpart in Japan, cannot have failed to impress and attract the Japanese and encourage them to choose the United Kingdom for Toyota —and what better location is there than the midlands?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is correct to pinpoint that aspect because it is important that we continue to set an atmosphere of success and productivity. In that way we shall continue to attract the type of investment that we have announced this week, which will provide employment for our people and continuing success in our economy. We welcome those developments and are confident that they will continue.

Company Fraud

3. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has for improving his Department's procedures in investigating those suspected of company frauds; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Francis Maude): In April last year the serious fraud office was established for the investigation and prosecution of serious and complex fraud. An increase in resources last year allocated to investigations by the Department of Trade and Industry has already resulted in such inquiries now being concluded in a much shorter time scale. In addition, following a review last year, the Companies Bill at present being considered in another place contains provisions which significantly improve procedures and extend powers for the investigation of companies.

Mr. MacKay: Even so, does my hon. Friend agree that there is still a regrettably long delay before people are prosecuted for company fraud, which is damaging for all concerned, including those being tried? Does he also agree, as a one-time practising barrister, that one of the principal reasons why it takes so long is that the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Department find it difficult to obtain a conviction when there are jury trials? Does he agree that the House fluffed the opportunity to change to a judge and two laymen, as the Roskill committee recommended, and that that should be implemented as a matter of urgency in the next Session of Parliament?

Mr. Maude: On the time scale, my hon. Friend will be delighted to know that in the past few years the average time for a Companies Act investigation has fallen from three years and five months to 18 months despite a general increase in the complexity of the investigations. I am sure that the House will welcome that marked improvement.

My hon. Friend is right that for a few trials of exceptional complexity the Roskill Committee recommended trial by judge and assessors rather than by jury. That was the only significant recommendation that the Government did not accept and, as my hon. Friend said, it was highly contentious. We accepted a number of other principally procedural recommendations, which should make it easier for juries to deal with exceptionally difficult cases.

Mr. Rees: Will the Minister look into the allegation of procedural confusion between the serious fraud office, his Department, fraud departments in the police force, the Crown prosecution service and the Attorney-General? With the best will on earth, people are getting the procedures wrong because they are too complicated.

Mr. Maude: A degree of complexity is inevitable. I know of no country with as sophisticated a corporate structure as ours where it is possible for administrative matters of this kind to be dealt with in a neat and tidy way. Different functions have to be carried out, and prosecuting authorities must remain independent. I do not foresee much scope for streamlining administrative structures, but I foresee scope—we have worked extremely hard to achieve this—for ensuring that the processes are much swifter. We are having considerable success along those lines.

Mr. Nelson: Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the answer may lie not in increasing the powers of the serious fraud office or of his Department, but in companies and their boards considering more adequately activities which may not necessarily amount to fraud but are certainly not intended uses of shareholders' money? Whether it concerns loans or activities wholly unassociated with the activities of a company—[HON. MEMBERS: "The Tory party."]—and whoever the non-executive staff or directors of a company may be, I suggest that the House should reconsider the proposals of the late Sir Brandon Rhys Williams on audit committees, which would allow such activity because it would be separately reported.

Mr. Maude: I hear what my hon. Friend says. As my hon. Friend no doubt did, I had a number of fascinating discussions with our late friend Sir Brandon on the subject. I do not accept the argument that the simple existence of an audit committee solves all the problems. Directors currently have a duty to account to shareholders for the

way in which shareholders' funds are used. Proper means are available for shareholders to hold directors to account for the way in which funds are used.

Mr. John Garrett: Why has not the inspector's report into the House of Fraser takeover been published, when no criminal proceedings are pending? If the Secretary of State is still awaiting the serious fraud office report, how is he able categorically to state that there have been wrongdoings?

Mr. Maude: It was perfectly clear from the outset, and it was stated in open court in the Court of Appeal. The hon. Gentleman should know enough about the world to understand that a case is not referred to the serious fraud office unless there is some sign of wrongdoing.

Consumer Rights

4. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he now plans to bring forward legislation affecting consumer rights.

Mr. Forth: We intend to improve the protection given to consumers in a number of ways, including the introduction of regulations under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 on price indications at bureaux de change and changes to other legislation affecting consumers' interests.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Minister for that reply, but is not the consumer getting an increasingly worse deal under this Government—who are supposed to believe in consumer choice—as a result of electricity and water price rises and private greed being put before public water and food quality? Is it not time that the consumer received a fairer deal?

Mr. Forth: The consumer gets an excellent deal in the United Kingdom, partly as a result of the general productivity of manufacturing industry, to which reference was made earlier, partly as a result of competitiveness and choice in the market-place and partly —the hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to this —as a result of excellent arrangements that have been put in place for the protection of consumers' interests in the process of privatising our major supply industries. All of that is ample evidence that consumers are extremely well served in the Britain of 1989.

Mr. Riddick: Is my hon. Friend aware that at this very moment the main clearing banks are holding a press conference at which they intend to make an announcement about the £50 limit on cheque guarantee cards? I am sure that he will join me in hoping that the banks will announce that the limit is to be increased and that each bank will be able to set its own limit. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is disgraceful that the banks have been allowed to carry on this cosy little cartel which has operated against the interests of the consumer? Will he join me in supporting any moves to see that the Office of Fair Trading investigates that kind of closed shop?

Mr. Forth: Such matters must primarily be matters for the banks themselves. It is for them to make a judgment on how best to deal with their consumers and customers in the market-place. Each of the banks must make its own judgment about how to respond to consumer pressure from time to time. I hope that they are prepared to take a realistic view of the matter and to examine a limit which has stood for a long time, but it must be a matter for the banks themselves and I have no intention of seeking to interfere.

Ms. Quin: Why is the Minister not proposing more fundamental improvements to the Consumer Protection Act 1987 so that, for example, agricultural produce is included and the unjustified exemptions in relation to product safety and liability are ended? Will the Minister also consider the introduction of environmental labelling such as exists in other countries so that the increasing number of consumers who are concerned about the environment can be sure that the products that they buy help the cause of environmental protection?

Mr. Forth: On her second visit to the Dispatch Box, the hon. Lady is being slightly mischievous in seeking to lead me into concerning myself with matters of food policy which she and the House know fall principally and rightly to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is more than capable of dealing with all matters of food protection and food hygiene which come before the House.

Mr. Harris: Can my hon. Friend tell the House whether he has undergone something of a conversion on the basic question of consumer rights in the short distance from his former place in the House to the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Forth: I am confident that when my hon. Friend studies whatever proposals I may bring before the House from time to time he will find himself fully able to support them.

Atlanta Sports Industries Ltd.

6. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, in the light of the problems of Atlanta Sports Industries Ltd. of Hellaby, near Rotherham, he will take urgent action to bring in amending regulations under patent law.

Mr. Forth: My Department is aware of this case, on which I have corresponded with the hon. Gentleman. As I understand the position, the problems of Atlanta Sports Industries Ltd. arose under copyright law, not patent law. The House will be aware that the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 has sought to remedy some of the weaknesses of the old law, but it cannot be retrospective. It is our intention that the detailed regulations will be in place by the summer.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister recognise that deficiencies in the law have caused serious and possibly increasing difficulties to that business and probably to others? After all our letters, does the Minister not recognise that a successful and enterprising business is being held back by the deficiencies of his Department, not least because the problem arose as a result of the company accepting the invitation of his Department to attend a particular trade fair?

Mr. Forth: I cannot accept that because a company has been helped by, in this case, the British Overseas Trade Board in attending a fair, the Government have any responsibility for transactions which may result from that. I believe that that is unreasonable. As the hon. Gentleman knows, most of the defects in the old law have been

remedied by the new law, but we cannot and should not make it retrospective. Much though I regret the circumstances in which the company finds itself, it is not a matter for Government and that must remain our position.

European Regional Development Fund

7. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the value of grants allocated to England from the European regional development fund since its inception.

Mr. Newton: The value of grants allocated to England from the European regional development fund since its inception in 1975 is £1,602 million, out of a total United Kingdom allocation of £3,307 million. Since 1975 the United Kingdom has received a larger allocation from the European regional development fund than any other member state apart from Italy.

Mr. Knox: It is a large figure. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the grants are making an important contribution to strengthening the British economy, and is he satisfied that the British people are fully aware of the scale of the grants?

Mr. Newton: No, I suspect that people are not fully aware of the scale of the grants and I should be glad to join my hon. Friend in trying to improve their knowledge of that matter. It is encouraging that local authorities and others concerned with the areas that are eligible are increasingly aware of the grants and are being increasingly effective in preparing good plans and playing a key part in making sure that we get our due share of the money.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister satisfied that west Cumberland is getting its fair share of those European moneys? Is he aware that in west Cumberland we have 43,000 sq. ft. of empty new factory in the middle of an enterprise zone in an area of high unemployment? Will he help us to find someone to occupy that factory? How about a bit of the Japanese money which seems to be circulating as we seem to have very little Japanese investment in west Cumberland? Can we have some?

Mr. Newton: First, I welcome the warmth of the hon. Gentleman's implied welcome for some of the investment that has been going elsewhere. I am afraid that I am not in a position to direct Japanese companies, but I shall certainly draw their attention to the existence of one enthusiastic Member of Parliament.

Mr. Soames: Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituency is the engine room of the British economy and that the infrastructure has consequently suffered greatly, especially due to the parsimony and greed of the Department of Transport? Will my right hon. Friend have a word with those responsible for the European regional development fund to see whether they can give us any assistance to build some better roads?

Mr. Newton: I must say that the prospect of the European Commission proposing the distribution of funds designed to help those who are having more difficult times for what my hon. Friend describes as the engine room of the British economy seems remote. I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me not to comment on his remarks about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, save to say, within the terms of collective responsibility, that I cannot quite agree with my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am delighted that such opportunities exist in England, but will the Minister draw to the attention of the European regional development fund and to incoming industrialists the fact that my constituency of Cynon Valley, which contains the deprived town of Mountain Ash and 45,000 sq. ft. of factory space—2,000 sq. ft more than that in west Cumberland—would be delighted to have any industrialists come to our area, where one in four men are unemployed?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will have noticed that I gave not just a figure for England but a much larger figure for the United Kingdom which, of course, includes the area in which the hon. Lady is interested. I will draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to the hon. Lady's remarks, but his response may be that, in general, Wales has not been doing too badly recently.

Sir Hal Miller: Is my right hon. Friend aware that parts of Hereford and Worcestershire have recently been removed by the European Commission from the scope of objective 2 of the European regional development fund? In those circumstances, will he confirm that the parts which remain United Kingdom assisted areas will not suffer in any way in terms of applications for regional selective assistance from the Government?

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the point that my hon. Friend makes and I can confirm that the Commission's proposals for the distribution of objective 2 money have no effect on the existing entitlement to assisted area status in this country and the help that goes with it. There is no direct coincidence between the two kinds of area.

Mr. Caborn: What proportion of the regional funds to which the Minister has just referred has been applied under the additionality rule, on which I understand that the regional funds have been allocated? Will he assure the House that the new European regional development fund and the Community's new structural fund arrangements will be additional to the national spend on regional assistance?

Mr. Newton: The agreed aim of everybody involved is that the European regional development fund shall add to the amount of investment taking place in development areas. The hon. Gentleman will know as well as I do that there can be a great deal of argument—I will not pretend that there is not—about precisely what that means. I do not think that I can give a more specific answer, because the whole question of the allocation under what has recently been announced in defining the objective 2 areas depends on the submission of plans, not all of which have yet been submitted.

Industry-School Links

8. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a further statement on his policy to increase links between industry and schools.

Mr. Forth: One hundred and forty-six DTI advisers on enterprise and education are now working, and the education service has asked them to find around 100,000 pupil work experience places in their first year.

My Department is also now offering a teacher placement service, which is being managed on our behalf by Understanding British Industry. I am pleased to announce that we have appointed a director for the service —Mr. Peter Davies. More than 80 local bodies have already expressed interest in offering the service, and the first organisers are in place. Teachers will be able to choose between a number of high-quality briefing packs. This year provides the opportunity to test both these packs and the matching service, to ensure that it all runs smoothly. The teacher placement service has been developed from the successful pilot schemes run for my Department by UBI last year. I will place in the Library a copy of the UBI's report.

Mr. Hunter: While acknowledging that industry is responding positively to the need for closer contact with schools, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he accepts that more needs to be done by all interested parties? Is he aware that in areas of high job creation, such as Basingstoke, followed closely by Crawley, the shortage of skills is becoming yet more acute, and that every measure must be taken to ensure that our school leavers have the attitude and the aptitude to contribute positively to the industrial and economic life of the country?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has summed up the problem extremely ably. We all recognise the increasing difficulty of skill shortages in many parts of the country. We have gone a long way towards recognising that this problem arises, as much as anything, from the schools. That is why the education and enterprise initiative seeks —and I believe that it has made a very good start—to address the problem of the lack of what might be called enterprise culture and understanding in many of our schools, which gives rise to a lack of proper career and educational counselling of youngsters. We hope that we shall see a lot of young people getting work experience and, more important, that we shall see teachers getting experience in the business world so that they may better advise and guide their public towards careers in the wealth-creating sector.

Mr. Skinner: I wonder whether part of one of these briefing packs that are to be issued to schools will contain information about fraud in the boardroom. Will it include, for instance, the city page of *The Daily Telegraph* of 15 April 1989, where it is reported that Blue Arrow loaned £25 million to de Savary and his gang; that, under section 432 of the Companies Act, the shareholders should have been fully informed of that matter, but were not; and that one of the directors of Blue Arrow is none other than the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)? Since that right hon. Member is supposed to represent those shareholders, he ought to be asking the Secretary of State to order an investigation, but as has is not here, I am doing it for him.

Mr. Forth: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's interest in the wealth-creating sector. I shall send him one of these packs, in the hope that it will increase his understanding of the process of wealth creation.

Sir John Stokes: Is not this a serious matter? Would it not be helpful to school leavers if leading industrialists could be more articulate about the scope for getting things done in industry, compared with some other professions, which I shall not mention? Why are these industrial tycoons such shy violets? Why can they not tell us how they make money and how that benefits the country also?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has made an important point. We hope that people in industry and business will be much more forthcoming and co-operative in trying to carry their message into schools and colleges so that young people may better understand how wealth is created and that it is only by the creation of wealth that we as a society can provide all the other services that we want to provide for our people.

Dr. Bray: Is the Minister aware that there is a clear understanding in industry that healthy links with schools depend on a parity of esteem and resources on the two sides, and that there is major concern that schools are simply not getting the teachers, particularly of science and mathematics, whom they need? Is he aware that, this year, applications were down by 25 per cent. for physics and by 16 per cent. for mathematics? Will the DTI lend its voice in support of industrialists who demand greater resources and esteem for teachers?

Mr. Forth: I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is aware of existing problems, and is tackling them with great vigour. The esteem in which the teaching profession is held is a matter for it. I hope that the conduct and dedication of teachers in future will help to increase the esteem in which they are held.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of our biggest problems is schoolchildren's perception of engineering, inventing and manufacturing, and that we must sell the status of those occupations? Without them Britain will never rebuild its industrial and commercial strength. I am not one of those, and I am sure that the Minister is not, who say that Britain cannot manufacture products competitively. We must demonstrate to young people that engineering, inventing and manufacturing are the future for Britain.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I recently discussed those matters with the Engineering Council. It is acutely aware of the matter, and is mounting a positive and active campaign to carry the message to where it will be heard and understood. Our record in manufacturing productivity increases, to which reference has been made today, amply demonstrates that we still have the ability and the will to make improvements and to continue to make manufacturing and industry generally an attractive proposition for our young people.

Multi-Fibre Arrangement

9. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the future continuation of the multi-fibre arrangement within the current negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Alan Clark): We are committed by the GATT declaration at Punte del Este to

formulate "modalities" for the eventual return of trade in textiles and clothing to strengthened GATT rules and disciplines.

The United Kingdom attaches the highest importance to the strengthening of GATT rules—in particular, a more effective safeguards clause to allow defensive action to be taken against sudden and damaging surges in imports, and better disciplines on unfair trade and on counterfeiting.

We look for a reduction in barriers to trade and better access to developing country markets, especially the newly industrialised economies. The committee acknowledged the contribution which all participants could make to the process of liberalisation, while preserving our existing rights under the present MFA.

Mr. Kirkwood: Having regard to recent developments in the GATT multilateral trade talks in Geneva and the importance of those developments to the knitwear industry in my constituency and in other areas, will the Minister guarantee that he will agree no further changes to the trading system for textiles and clothing unless he secures some of the aims that he mentioned, such as the effective prevention of dumping and subsidies, the GATT safeguard clause, and the dismantling of excessive trade barriers, which effectively block our exports in trade and clothing items?

Mr. Clark: I accept that all the factors that the hon. Gentleman mentioned must be taken into account in considering the degree to which the provisions of the multi-fibre arrangement are relaxed or dispensed with. Safeguards clauses are important. As many hon. Members with textile constituencies know, the existing mechanism is unsatisfactory. It is cumbersome and slow. I will ask my officials to look at possibilities for improvements and making better use of the provisions under article 19.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend will know that many hon. Members are legitimately concerned about the undeveloped world, but that same lobby also seeks completely unrestricted entry into this country of textiles from the undeveloped world. Such a policy could destroy tens of thousands of jobs in the Nottingham and east midlands area. I hope that we will not go down a road that will destroy those British jobs.

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is right. Paradoxically many of those jobs are held by former citizens of, or immigrants from the very countries for which the lobby that he identifies seeks unrestricted access.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister make a clear statement that the Government are committed to the renewal of the MFA? The Confederation of British Wool Textiles Ltd., the employers' organisation based in Bradford, is concerned that there has not been a clear and unambiguous statement, particularly as the industry is faced with a Community quota by 1992, instead of a quota for each member state, to make sure that there is a burden-sharing arrangement for the whole of the EEC. Emloyers are also fearful of increased water charges. The effect of those developments will be a loss of jobs. Will the Minister make a clear commitment to maintain the textile industry?

Mr. Clark: There is no commitment to maintain the MFA. The commitment is to formulate modalities for the eventual return of trade in textiles and clothing to strengthened GATT rules. That has been unchanged for the last 15 years since the MFA was promulgated. As I have said on the Floor of the House in debate on the subject, that return is dependent on a satisfactory solution of a very large number of other related problems.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend agree that the commitment of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) to Liberalism appears to be somewhat lukewarm in the attitude that he has evinced in his supplementary question? Does my hon. Friend also agree that arrangements such as the multi-fibre arrangement are an arbitrary restriction on consumer choice and on the export potential of Third world countries, and therefore contribute to their impoverishment? Why do we support free trade in every other area of the economy but not in this?

Mr. Clark: It is not for me to comment on the esoteric varieties of policy that the Liberal party adopts at any given moment. Consumers do not have a high purchasing power when they are out of work. There are large numbers of consumers who constantly seek advice about buying British goods. There is no special adjunct of faith that dictates and obliges that consumers should always buy the cheapest thing. They consider other factors in making a consumer choice.

Mr. Henderson: The Minister for Trade's personal commitment to the MFA is recognised in the House, and the arrangement is an important way of regulating trade between the far east and ourselves. Is he not also concerned about the growing trade gap in textiles with the EC, which is now £1.75 billion? What does he think has caused that gap? If he is concerned about it, what action will he take to try to narrow the gap?

Mr. Clark: That is a completely different subject from the multi-fibre arrangement. Trade with the EC is not governed by it. Competition, measured in terms of delivery, quality, price and so on, is the yardstick. There are elements where Government subsidy is present. Those are subject to Commission scrutiny. If any hon. Member advises me of cases where EC subsidies affect the balance of competition, we will immediately consider them closely.

New Businesses

10. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many new businesses have been established in Leicestershire each year since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The numbers of new businesses registered for VAT in Leicestershire for each of the five years from 1983 to 1987 were respectively, 3,003, 2,885, 3,033, 2,961 and 3,347. During that period the total numbers of businesses registered has increased every year, growing by 13 per cent. overall.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Hinckley, the principal town in my constituency, demand for industrial land far outstrips supply, that the council has just had to release another 120 acres, and that 158 acres are currently under consideration by private developers? Does he agree that that demonstrates the effectiveness of

Government policies and the prudent policies adopted by the Conservative-controlled Hinckley and Bosworth borough council?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend has it exactly right. Because my constituency borders that of my hon. Friend, I know from my local knowledge that there has been a considerable growth of economic activity in our area. New companies are doing well, employment has increased substantially and the prosperity of the area has grown markedly.

Mr. Ashby: Does my hon. Friend agree that an important element in industrial growth and in the growth of new industries is the infrastructure? Within my area of north-west Leicestershire, an excellent road system is being built, including the new M42-A42 road. However, an important element of that road system is correct and proper road signs so that people who want to go to the new industries in towns such as Coalville and Ashby know how to get there. Will my hon. Friend speak to the Secretary of State for Transport to ensure that there are properly marked road signs?

Mr. Maude: I know that a great many people are seeking to find a way to my hon. Friend's constituency. I shall certainly speak to my right hon. Friend about whether steps can be taken to enable them to find their way to it more easily.

Cordless Telephones

12. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress is being made in discussions between his Department and the industry in connection with the development of the next generation of cordless telephones.

Mr. Forth: We have issued some 2,000 copies of the consultation document "Personal Communications in the 1990s" and held initial briefing meetings with a number of companies. We are asking for responses to the document by 28 April.

Mr. Wood: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. Will he ensure that the discussions are sufficiently brisk and that the aims are sufficiently straightforward to enable us to have successful competitive manufacturing in that sector, without undue Government or other bureaucratic delays that could adversely affect our competitive position?

Mr. Forth: I can give my hon. Friend that undertaking, but I believe that he will agree that we have already demonstrated as a country remarkable success in that area due to the liberal regime allowed by the Government. We will continue with that policy in the hope that we will continue to be world leaders in what will be an important industry in the future.

Mergers and Acquisitions

13. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the percentage increase in expenditure on mergers and acquisitions since 1979.

Mr. Maude: Expenditure on acquisitions and mergers by industrial and commercial companies within the United Kingdom in 1988 is estimated to be about £22 billion. In current prices, that is about 13 times greater than the 1979 total of about £1·75 billion.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister agree that, if Scottish industry did not have to spend so much effort in fighting off mergers and takeovers, it could create new work, which might help a constituency such as mine where the official unemployment rate is 22 per cent.?

Mr. Maude: The idea that merger and acquisition activity reduces employment is manifestly absurd. Over the period when merger and acquisition activity has been at its height, unemployment has come down and employment has risen to record levels. The premise on which the hon. Lady bases her question is utterly absurd.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should be congratulated on not allowing the bid for Scottish and Newcastle Breweries? Scottish Members should congratulate my hon. Friend rather than indulge in negative comments.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the careful scrutiny of that bid by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. As a result of the commission making an adverse public interest finding, the bid was not allowed to proceed. I did not hear all that many cheers from the Opposition when that happened.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister think that it is wise for former holders of his ministerial post subsequently to take up paid appointments as advisers on mergers and acquisitions? Is that not a misuse of the information and knowledge gained in that post?

Mr. Maude: No, Sir.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Precisely because merger activity has increased so much would it not make sense, particularly because of the conflict of interest that exists between investment management and corporate finance, to bring the role of merchant bank advisers under the aegis of the Financial Services Act 1986, as some of us recommended in the debate on the financial services White Paper four years ago?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend was lucky enough to be privy to discussions on that Bill at which I was unable to be present. I suspect that his proposal to extend the scope of the Financial Services Act into an area which, at the moment, it does not cover would not be at all welcome. There are proper mechanisms for making sure that conflicts of interest do not arise and that proper interests are preserved. It would not be right to extend the system in the way that my hon. Friend suggests.

Hosiery and Knitwear Industry (Leicester)

14. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the current state of the hosiery and knitwear industry in Leicester.

Mr. Alan Clark: The hosiery and knitwear industries continue to make a major contribution to Leicester's economic and industrial development. They continue to adapt to technological and other changes, to the further benefit of local and national economies.

Mr. Janner: While noting the Minister's tribute to the hosiery, knitwear and textile industries may I ask him whether he recognises that there is still grave concern in those industries about the continuing recession and that there is also concern in my constituency about the redundancies in Coras? How many jobs have been lost in Leicester in the hosiery and knitwear industries in the last few years and what is the Minister proposing to do, if anything, to help those industries to survive in the light of the increased water charges that are now on the way?

Mr. Clark: The hon. and learned Gentleman sometimes reproaches hon. Members for not addressing him as learned, although I do not think that he aspires to the sobriquet of gallant. As a man of the law, the hon. and learned Gentleman will know that there are many international restrictions. Trade in textiles is governed by treaty, by arrangement and by restraint arrangements.

Mr. Skinner: And the Minister does not like them.

Mr. Clark: I would tighten them up if I could. The hon. and learned Gentleman well knows that any interference with the flow of trade outside those limits would lay one open both to judicial review and to legal action by importers.

Export Promotion

17. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress on recent initiatives on export promotion.

Mr. Alan Clark: Since the launch of My Department's export initiative about 3,000 inquiries have been received in response to our advertisements in the press alone. I believe that the initiative has been well received by British industry and is succeeding in encouraging more businesses to export successfully.

Miss Widdecombe: Is it true that the initiative is costing about £100 million per annum? If so, what is likely to be the long-term effect on our balance of payments? Will it repay this investment?

Mr. Clark: The total amount expended in export promotion by the Government is £100 million per annum, or rather more. The initiative has a number of different headings, chiefly related to the giving of advice and information to would-be exporters. Export initiatives single market campaigns, such as Focus Germany and the Opportunity Japan campaigns have been extremely successful. During the year in which the campaign was in place, our exports to Germany increased by 17 per cent. compared with an international average increase of 3 per cent.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Minister satisfied with the operation of the exchange equalisation account?

Mr. Clark: The exchange equalisation account is a matter for my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury. In so far as it affects the exchange rate, plainly, one has to accept that it is a transient and temporary phenomenon. Many traders would probably prefer it not to exist or to operate at all.

Information Technology

19. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects Britain to have a trade surplus in information technology.

Mr. Newton: It is not possible to make a prediction of the kind that the hon. Member seeks. What is important is that the Government's economic policies have led to record levels of productivity, output and investment and have helped to attract companies like Fujitsu, which will provide a major boost to our balance of trade in information technology through both exports an import substitution.

Mr. Eadie: I thank the Minister for his answer but would it not have been better, in all candour, for him to have said "unlikely"? Since, in reply to a similar question, the Minister made it clear that the Government policy was to make Britain attractive to foreign investment, and since we are told that there is a lot of footloose capital and industry in this country which apparently prefers to invest abroad rather than in Britain, how does that square with the Minister's policy that he has enunciated to the House?

Mr. Newton: I see no inconsistency whatever. Not only are a lot of people from overseas investing here, as has become clear in recent weeks, but there has been a substantial increase in the rate of investment by Britons in manufacturing industries and in other sectors. Our aim is to make the whole country a good place to invest in for foreigners and those already here, and we have succeeded in that.

Liquidations (Investor Losses)

20. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has concerning losses to investors in financial institutions which have gone into liquidation over the last 12 months.

Mr. Maude: My Department only keeps records of those financial institutions in respect of which it has itself applied for compulsory winding-up orders. In the past 12 months such action has been taken against eight financial institutions. In these cases the losses to investors are estimated at £4 million. This figure does not include cases where winding-up orders were sought by the Securities and Investments Board.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that Greenan Investment Management in Ayr went into liquidation with a loss to investors of £1 million? Following this up, I find that some of those investors will not be fully compensated by the investors' compensation management scheme. Will the Minister look into the matter to see whether there are ways in which compensation can be improved?

I understand from Sir Anthony Barrowclough, the Parliamentary Commissioner, that his report on Barlow Clowes, which was expected this month, will take several months more because of the complicated nature of the investigations into the affair, which he is supervising personally. In the light of that, does the Minister think that it is fair to ask investors to wait many more months before they have any chance of receiving compensation, or will he now consider some kind of scheme to help those who have

lost very substantially indeed, some of whom are retired people, including retired miners in my constituency, who are now in great difficulties as a result of the collapse?

Mr. Maude: I am very much aware of the distress and hardship caused to people whose money was not repaid to them following the liquidation of Barlow Clowes. I cannot comment on how long the Parliamentary Commissioner's investigation will take; it is a matter entirely in his control and it is for him to draw it to a conclusion when he can. All I can say is that my Department has co-operated fully with his investigation at every stage.

As regards providing compensation at this stage, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I see no reason now for changing the view that we reached in the autumn, when we concluded, on the basis of Sir Godfray Le Quesne's detailed and exhaustive report, that the Department's handling of the case had been careful and considered and that, on those grounds, there was no basis for making ex gratia payments.

Merchant Ships (Orders)

23. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent information he has on new orders for merchant ships.

Mr. Newton: Based on information from Lloyd's register, new orders as well as completions in 1988 were at the lowest level for many years. The most recent figures suggest that a period of recovery may be beginning, but there is little evidence that it will be lasting and it is expected that the world shipbuilding market will remain dominated by considerable excess capacity for several years.

Mr. Clay: The Minister must also be aware of figures from Lloyd's maritime information service which I have sent him. They demonstrate conclusively from the most reliable source in the world that for the kind of ships built by British shipyards and, in particular, North East Shipbuilders in Sunderland, the last quarter of 1988 was the best for new orders for many years and that what we were told by the Government throughout last year and the year before, which was that there was no evidence of an upturn, has proved categorically wrong. We also now know that in 1988 prices for new build ships rose by 30 per cent. in one year. Has not the penny finally dropped that the Department of Trade and Industry has got this wrong and that this is a crazy time to close major British shipyards?

Mr. Newton: I have two comments. First, the hon. Gentleman puts more weight on the statistics to which he referred than they will bear. Secondly, whatever the state of demand for shipbuilding, it is necessary—as it was, unhappily, in the case of North East Shipbuilders Ltd. —to consider the prospects against the background of those seeking to run the yards so that they will be able to build such ships in a competitive and commercial way.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise the matter of separation of powers. As I understand it, the police are not an arm of the Government. No information has been given to the House about the way in which a list of five people, shortlisted for the position of Scotland Yard's director of public affairs, was given to Scotland Yard by the Prime Minister's chief press secretary.

I consider that the functions of the police are a matter that should be of concern to the House. If the Prime Minister's chief press secretary now has the additional function of telling the person in charge of the Metropolitan police who should be shortlisted for such an important position, the House should be notified and we should be able to table questions.

Mr. Speaker: That may well be a matter of interest to the House, but it is not an appropriate subject for a point of order.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like your advice on a matter of great importance—certainly to the people of Liverpool. *The Sun* today contains a front page story headlined "The Truth". It is not in inverted commas. The story is based on a statement made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick). It says:

"Irvine Patnick revealed that in one shameful episode, a gang of Liverpool fans noticed that the blouse of a girl trampled to death had risen above her breasts."

I do not intend to continue; it is so painful to read it.

The article also states that the hon. Member for Hallam spoke to officers on duty. A police inquiry is taking place at the moment and I should like to know whether the hon. Gentleman—I notified him that I would be raising this matter in the House, and if he is not here that is his business—will be asked to give evidence to the police inquiry.

I find it difficult to raise this matter because the other day in the House I said that we should not be looking for scapegoats. On the front page of *The Sun* is a picture of Superintendent Marshall. We should not look on him or anybody else as a scapegoat. However, the hon. Member for Hallam is now suggesting that Liverpool people did the most despicable things to their own people. All the television programmes showed evidence to the contrary.

I do not want to become too angry and emotional about this, but I find it degrading and disgusting—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is the point of order?"] The point of order is clear. It is time that hon. Members showed some dignity, restraint and understanding. If they think that this is funny, they should explain it to my people in Liverpool who are now in deepest grief because 95 of their people died on Saturday. May I have an assurance, Mr. Speaker, that that hon. Member will go to the police inquiry and give the so-called evidence? We need that evidence to prove beyond doubt that matters are going beyond the bounds of decency.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The whole House has been deeply affected by this major tragedy. I think that it would be wisest for us all to await the result of the inquiry and not to speculate.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received a request from a Minister to make a statement clarifying the position of two senior Government press officers who, we learned last night from a BBC programme at 7.20 pm, are being disciplined for having argued that they were required to take action that infringed party political neutrality? The programme, which lasted for 40 minutes, was about the Government's chief press officer, the most important man——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an Opposition day, in which a large number of hon. Members wish to participate. I have received no request for a statement. The hon. Gentleman must find other methods of raising the matter before the House: he cannot do so through the Chair.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) referred to a comment made to *The Sun* by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick). Do you agree that on Monday you called that hon. Member to speak in the debate? Do you also agree that he made no such comments to the House then? Would you advise hon. Members, Mr. Speaker, to be temperate in their language when commenting on the events at Sheffield and not to repeat to newspapers hearsay that they are not willing to put to the test by raising it in the House first?

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the few places where we can say something at such a tense time in Sheffield.

I am the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough. On Saturday night, when I went down to the ground, I was not even admitted to the premises. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick), whose constituency is nowhere near Hillsborough, could have gone into the mortuary and talked to policemen on duty, while I, as Member for Parliament for that general area, could not even get into the ground. That is beyond me. It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman is doing precisely what my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has described.

Mr. Speaker: I say again that this is a matter by which we have all been deeply affected. I suggest that we all keep our counsel until the result of the inquiry is known.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A number of questions have been raised about the suppression of the Department of Trade and Industry report on the Harrods takeover. I wonder whether you have received any notification from the Department that it intends to publish the report, or that a Minister intends to make a statement to the House.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the matter has certain implications. In the report, the Sultan of Brunei is alleged to have supplied some money for the takeover. As he is apparently on close terms with the Prime Minister, it is naturally a matter of great concern that the report should be published as soon as possible to eradicate the rumours that are circulating.

Mr. Speaker: I have not received any such notification.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice on a matter of

serious concern that has arisen this week. The Secretary of State for Social Security has sent to DSS officers in Scotland a memorandum giving them instructions on taking unpaid poll tax from people's income support. The memorandum is based on a statutory instrument which has been prayed against but which has not yet been debated on the Floor of the House. Has the Secretary of State the right to give instructions to DSS officers based on a statutory instrument to which the House has not given its approval?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Lady should seek advice when that comes into operation. I have no knowledge of the matter that she has raised.

Mrs. Fyfe: May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, at least to look into the matter?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I shall certainly look into the matter.

Mr. Winnick: You stated, Mr. Speaker, that right hon. and hon. Members could pursue matters by other means. As you, Mr. Speaker, decided on such matters, may I have an assurance that, if I wish to table—as I probably shall—questions relating to Mr. Bernard Ingham's role in the recommendation as to who should be appointed director of public affairs at New Scotland Yard, I will be able to do so? Mr. Ingham is now virtually the deputy Prime Minister, and we should surely have an opportunity to discuss his role.

Mr. Speaker: Certainly, and the hon. Gentleman will have opportunities to do so—but not through me. I am not responsible for what he does.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Rather than right hon. and hon. Members raising points of order, would it not be much better if the Government themselves, in the traditional way, made a statement, or even had a written question planted, about the disciplining of civil servants? Why should right hon. and hon. Members have to demand information on every possible occasion? Is it not for the Government to show the House what is happening in respect of the disciplining of civil servants?

Mr. Speaker: I am placed in great difficulty because I cannot give answers on matters for which I am not responsible. I am here to ensure that the rules of the House are observed. I am not responsible for what is said by right hon. and hon. Members, provided that it is in order.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Instead of Opposition Members coming to the House to crowd out the debating time available to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and to his right hon. and hon. Friends with bogus points of order in prime time, and to make statements that they would not dare to make outside the House because they would be actionable as defamatory, would it not be better if a change were made to the rules of the House so that Opposition Members could have a whole day set aside for bogus points of order and they could all be raised together?

Mr. Speaker: I should not like to be in the Chair for that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The fact that Bernard Ingham is not a Member of Parliament creates some difficulties for you, but there is a way out of them. Mr. Ingham has plenty of admirers on the Conservative Benches, and I suggest that one of them takes the Chiltern Hundreds and nominates St. Bernard and his dog so that he can stand on behalf of the Tory party. Then we can deal with him.

BILL PRESENTED

ANTI-HACKING

Miss Emma Nicholson presented a Bill to create offences of unathorised access to electronically stored data and of its transmission; to confer powers of monitoring search, seizure and destruction of such data; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time: and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 July and to be printed. [Bill 120.]

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 10470/88 on batteries and accumulators be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Leasehold Reform (Commonhold)

3.41 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to reform leasehold.

Many hundreds of thousands of people live in flats that they own under long leases, yet those Englishmen's homes are someone else's castles. The unsatisfactory nature of leasehold reform as applied to long leases for mansion blocks has long been recognised, although it is only recently that the abuses of the system have dramatically grown.

There have been a number of attempts at leasehold reform by various Governments as well as by individual parliamentarians. My distinguished predecessor as Member for Kensington, the late Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, was for ever in the House introducing measures to allow residents of mansion blocks to acquire more rights under their leaseholds. I am here as one more foot soldier in that campaign.

Leaseholders might own a property for 50 or 100 years yet possess only a diminishing asset, with little control over who owns or runs their property. Under English law, it is almost impossible to own a freehold flat. That has been widely recognised as wrong, not only by reformers in this country but, more tellingly, by other nations that inherited British leasehold law as part of their colonial paraphernalia. Those countries wisely changed their laws. Shamefully, we have failed to do so. In the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, laws have been passed that seek to increase home ownership, and particularly flat ownership, in urban areas by dropping leasehold law from their statute books and replacing it with something else. It is that something else, which is called commonhold, that I seek to introduce today.

The law of commonhold varies slightly from country to country. The common thread, however, is that in every case it permits the freehold ownership of flats and allows residents to own and run their blocks. Therefore, it is vastly superior and more encouraging to home ownership and equity than our antiquated and unreformed practice. The building societies and Consumer Association are among those who have led the attempt to introduce this measure of leasehold reform into England and Wales, encouraged by a report of the Law Commission, their own careful research and the unhappy complaints of an increasing number of flat owners.

The building societies, among others, have pushed for the adoption of the Australian system of leasehold reform and freehold flat ownership, which, anglicised to our own quaint ways, is called commonhold. This system gives residents in a block of flats a freehold with standardised rights and obligations for the rest of the residential block. The individual owners have full ownership of their flats and joint ownership of a management body which owns and administers common parts such as the hall, the roof and the outside walls, and looks after the building's repair to the satisfaction of the people living in the block and not some remote and ever-changing owner of the residual freehold.

Under commonhold, the law is completely clear in contrast with the current position in England and Wales whereby flats have to be sold on long leaseholds. Often the lease is badly drafted, and frequently is incomprehensible even to lawyers. The system allows in the unscrupulous landlord and gives the flat owner a dwindling rather than a growing asset which becomes more difficult to sell and on which it is more difficult to raise a mortgage as the lease runs out.

Thousands of flats in London now have leases of less than 50 years, and that is where the danger creeps in. The Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 helped to alleviate some of the difficulties, and the Government are to be congratulated on implementing the recommendations of the 1986 Nugee report which gave flat owners a say in insurance arrangements in their blocks and forced the landlord to give them first refusal when he decides to sell the freehold. However, that did not go far enough and was merely tinkering with an essentially defective system.

Commonhold will get rid of that landlord-tenant relationship. Each flat owner would own the freehold of his unit and share in the administration and the ownership of his block. There is no lease. Under the Bill, all new blocks of flats will be sold automatically in commonhold, which most developers are keen on, as few reputable developers want to be left with a residual freehold interest and normally sell it on to less reputable people as soon as they can. Existing leaseholders would have the opportunity to buy their freeholds and convert to commonhold. I am assured that building societies would readily lend the money for such a purchase, and many of the freehold cowboys who own a residual freehold interest would willingly be bought out.

In short, commonhold would give flat owners full, first class ownership of their homes for the first time. The Law Commission is even now beavering away, on instructions from the Lord Chancellor's Department, to write the necessary legislation to bring commonhold to the statute book. According to the Lords *Hansard* for June 1988, that is well under way.

More recently, according to *Hansard* of 19 January 1989, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), it was said that these things are under the active consideration of the Attorney-General with the idea of converting theory into law. The purpose of my Bill is to speed that action so that the system of flat ownership designed in the last century might be reformed, with luck, by the next. This reform is one that I believe is called in the Treasury a "lollipop" —it costs nothing but it would be exceedingly popular. I commend it to the House

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Sir George Young, Mr. John Heddle, Mr. Gerald Bowden, Mr. Chris Butler, Mr. Hugo Summerson, Miss Ann Widdecombe and Mr. Matthew Carrington.

LEASEHOLD REFORM (COMMONHOLD)

Mr. Dudley Fishburn accordingly presented a Bill to reform leasehold; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 July and to be printed. [Bill 121.]

Opposition Day

[8TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Investment in the Future

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.50 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I beg to move,

That this House notes the long-term failure of the British economy to meet the challenges of a competitive and technological world; expresses its profound concern at the increasing United Kingdom trade deficit in the information technology and electronics industries; notes the United Kingdom's gap in computer and other technological skills; and calls upon the Government to boost investment in high tech infrastructure and civil research and development and to work with industry and the education service to create the skills base that is vital to the modern, efficient and innovative economy that the United Kingdom desperately needs, if the next decade is to overcome the missed opportunities of the 1980s.

I think that I am right in saying that this is the first major debate for some time on a trade and industry subject. It comes in an afternoon in which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), has answered questions on trade and industry matters, and a private Member's Bill on hacking has been introduced. Therefore, it is an important day for trade and industry and I am delighted to be able to introduce a debate of this nature.

I am glad that the Chancellor of the Duchy will be replying to the debate. He and I do not agree about many of the main planks of the Government's policy. However, he is widely respected as someone who considers and is briefed on his subject closely.

I do not want it to be believed that I and my party think that everything the Government have done has been wrong. That is not the case. In the past 10 years the Government have had some considerable achievements. The greatest achievement the Government will have to their name is the democratisation of the trade union movement. That will be their enduring memorial—*[Interruption.]* I hear the Labour Members sitting in front of me disagreeing. We will wait and see the evidence of history.

One of the Government's most significant achievements is the pursuit of enterprise and self-employment. My argument with the Government on those matters is that they have not gone far enough or fast enough in the direction of the policy they have outlined.

We must ask whether the propaganda we are fed by the Government—that all that adds up to an economic miracle—stands up under examination. The old moss-covered tombstones of British industrial decline still stand after 10 years of Thatcherism. We still have the highest inflation of any major advanced industrial nation; we still have the highest interest rates of any of our major OECD competitors; we still have wage rises racing well ahead of inflation; we still have net investment—investment as a percentage of GDP—which is at best static and, according to some figures, falling; we still have overall industrial production only just blipping above the 1979 level; we still have a continual loss of our share of world markets as our goods fail to meet the right standards in terms of price and, perhaps more important, quality and we still have a trading deficit of unheard of historic proportions which is now seriously undermining the strength of the British economy.

In many ways, all those symptoms are depressingly similar. Far from having an economic miracle in the 1980s we have, standing clear and evident to everybody, the old signposts of British malaise. We have an industrial system which has failed to produce effectively for world markets and has failed to win new shares of those markets. We have not made progress in what I believe to be the fundamental change that the British economy and British industrial base must achieve in the last years of the century if they are to face up to the new challenges. That fundamental change must be away from being a low-quality industrial assembler to being a high-quality industrial producer.

Perhaps a more fundamental change is needed in our industrial base away from a high-resource use, low-value-added industrial base to a low-resource use and high-value-added base. Information technologies are the key to that fundamental change. In *The Times* on 16 September 1986, the Alvey committee said that the

"basic economic situation dictates that we must become a net exporter of high technology and high value added goods."

That statement was right, but the committee was wrong in the prediction that followed. It said that, if things continued as it calculated when it wrote the report, by 1990 Britain would become a nation in deficit in high technology information-based trade by £1 billion a year. We have yet to reach the end of the 1980s, yet that predicted deficit is already twice as high: it is running at £2·19 billion and growing. In 1984, the figure was £1·8 billion, but it has increased to £2·19 billion. In 1979, we had a surplus in information technology trade that amounted to about 0·5 per cent. of GDP; we are currently running a deficit of just over 0·5 per cent. of GDP.

Many believe, and I am one, that the underlying weakness in our industrial base lies in information technologies. It is essential that Britain corrects that. It will involve not only inventing new technologies but manufacturing and, above all, applying them. Our failure to do so underlies our weakness.

Behind the bold figures of the industrial deficit that I have given, there are even more worrying facts. Let us consider innovation. Britain is second only to the United States in Nobel prize winners, and per capita our inventions and achievements are greater than any nation. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Britain had a truly superb record in innovative technologies. But that record is a past record. Our innovative capacity has dropped sharply. In 1963, over 26 per cent. of European applicants for new United States patents were British. By 1985, the figure had fallen by 16 per cent. We are the only major advanced OECD country whose percentage of applications for United States patents has dropped. We now apply for 2 per cent. of United States patents and are below even France as an innovative nation.

Perhaps that is not surprising, as the number of people working in research and development—scientists and engineers—has fallen over the past 10 years. Using a figure for every 10,000 of population, of all the OECD nations we have the fewest scientists and engineers working in the research sector. In 1983, 32 per cent. of engineers were working in research and development, yet now we have only 30 per cent.

[Mr. Paddy Ashdown]

Britain has opted out of many of the new technologies, such as the space programme. The Secretary of State for Energy had to go to Moscow to hitch a ride on a Soviet spacecraft sponsored by British industry for us to have any input into the space programme.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the underlying problems of our poor research base is the dreadful salaries paid to brilliant research scientists? Does he accept that at the Electricity Council research centre at Capenhurst in Cheshire the best salary a brilliant 30-year-old researcher can expect is well under £30,000, which is poor compared with salaries available abroad?

Mr. Ashdown: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend's comment. But that is not the only underlying reason. I shall come on to that subject in a minute. Another reason is the lack of adequate research money to provide researchers with the facilities that they need. As I shall point out later, there has been a major flood of some of our highest and best researchers to, for example, the United States and other nations where they are paid much better.

Mr. Alex Carlile: And to the City.

Mr. Ashdown: If they had been going into industry, I might be a little more optimistic, but they seem to be leaving this country altogether.

These facts show up in our own domestic market. Britain has the fastest growing new technology market, after Japan, in the world, yet our share of our own market and our capacity to even fulfil our own market demands has now dropped massively from 50 per cent. to less than one third in the past seven or eight years. A National Economic Development Council report in June 1988 identified the reason for that clearly—lack of investment.

Investment in research and development is a contentious subject in Britain, as we already spend a higher proportion of our investment in research and development on defence-related research and development than any other nation in a way that frequently holds up the research and development we need in our industrial sector. Even in terms of non-defence research and development, whereas, between 1971 and 1985, all our major industrial competitors increased their research in non-defence research and development, we reduced our research in the non-defence sector. In Japan, it has increased from 1·8 per cent. to 2·8 per cent. of gross domestic product. In West Germany, it has increased from 2 per cent. to 2·5 per cent. It has increased in France and the United States and only the United Kingdom's share of non-defence-related research and development has dropped, from 1·8 per cent. to 1·5 per cent.

I see the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster wondering about those figures. I direct him to the "Save British Science" report which gives the figures. I have them here if he wants to look at them. I ask hon. Gentlemen who may read the *Hansard* report later to plot those figures on a graph and then to plot on a graph the level of industrial production in each of those nations. They will find that the two curves correlate almost exactly. Nations that have invested more in non-defence-related research and development have seen overall industrial production rise, whereas ours has similarly declined.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a correlation between the success of both the Japanese and West German economies and the small percentage of gross national product that they spend on defence, as opposed to the large amount that we spend on defence? Most of our research and development is defence-related. Why, then, does the right hon. Gentleman support such a high level of defence expenditure?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman must have missed the point I made earlier. I conceded that Britain is spending 50 per cent. of its research and development on defence and I said that that was one factor holding back the proper development of civilian research and development. Other factors, such as secrecy, are involved, too. In the United States, defence-related projects in which new ideas are developed will move across into the civilian sector, but our own secrecy frequently prevents that from happening here. I could give the hon. Gentleman examples of how that happens.

Government-funded civil research has dropped similarly. Between 1981 and 1989, it dropped from 0.73 per cent. to about 0.5 per cent. In terms of money, that means that £800 million less is going into Government-funded civil research. Even allowing for the extra £100 million that was put aside in last year's Autumn Statement, it means a £700 million drop. It means that as a percentage of gross domestic product, Government-funded civil research will be lower in 1990 than it was in 1981.

But we are not talking merely about a lack of investment in physical goods, research or technologies. We are talking as well about the other component, which is lack of investment in people. In Britain today, the largest and most significant factor holding back production is the skill gap that afflicts our industries.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) referred to the brain drain. Indeed, at the top level, we are seeing a major brain drain. I visited silicon valley a little while ago; it is a fact of life that the greatest expatriate population of silicon valley, not even excluding Hispanics, comprises expatriates of Britain who emigrated to pursue new technology.

In November 1988, the *New York Times* made an extraordinary statement about the influx of our intellectual capital into the United States, stating that it composed

"The largest single influx into this country"—

that is, the United States—

"from a single source since the Jewish professors were forced to leave Germany and Austria in the 1930s."

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): The right hon. Gentleman has failed to identify when those expatriates went to silicon valley. Is it not the case that the head of Bell-Labs, the head of Hewlett-Packard's research department and the head of Rolm are all expatriates of this country, but that they emigrated in the 60s and 70s? Is it not also the case that there is now substantial evidence of reverse migration among many of the people who emigrated 20 years ago?

Mr. Ashdown: I can tell the hon. Gentleman precisely what he wants to know, because, as I recall, I visited silicon valley in 1985 when the present Government had been in power for six years. Every person to whom I spoke—they were all either high in the research structures of firms or running firms themselves—had emigrated from Britain since this Government came to power. If there is evidence of a reverse trend, I shall be interested to know it, but I will be the hon. Gentleman any money that he cares to lay that over the 10-year period since 1979, Britain has lost massively more researchers and scientists abroad than have come to this country.

I turn now to the skill gap as it affects industry. I refer to the National Computing Centre—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may find this strange and amusing, but I do not and nor, I believe, do the people of Britain. In 1988 the National Computing Centre estimated that we now have 6,000 fewer programmers and analysts than industry needs.

On 27 February this year, *The Independent* published an article stating that British industry is now short of about 30,000 experienced information technology staff. It predicted that unless there is a change of Government policy, by 1993 Britain will be short of about 100,000 experienced industrial information technology staff.

We know that a report published earlier this year by the Confederation of British Industry identified that the skill gap in Britain posed a major barrier for many of our firms. Even in Merseyside, which has high unemployment, 30 per cent. of firms are being held back because they cannot find people with the appropriate skills.

Meanwhile, the number of those applying for information technology-related degrees in our universities is dropping fast. Those figures underlie our industrial weakness and will ensure our continuing decline in information technologies.

However, the picture given by the bald statistics is not the whole picture, because it misses out the central fact which, more than anything else, is a contributory cause of the deplorable position that Britain is now in. I refer to the Government's attitude towards information technology and new industries. I do not pretend for a moment that the Government found themselves in an easy position because they did not.

No one can doubt that Britain was facing a major problem when the Government came to power in 1979, but the Government's inability and unwillingness to tackle that problem effectively now holds them to be indicted. Time and again they have shown that they do not care about British invention and technical skill. Indeed, time and again they have shown that they do not even recognise it; and time and again they have refused to support British invention, so that time and again something is invented in this country, but others then produce it, and we end up adding to our balance of payments deficit by buying it back from them.

I want to give the House three simple examples of how this has happened in the past.

Mr. Tony Banks: Hovercraft.

Mr. Ashdown: Hovercraft is not one of them. Nowadays I do not count it as in the front range of new technology.

Let me take, first of all, the transputer, invented in INMOS, which was established by Labour's National Enterprise Board. The transputer—sometimes known as a computer on a chip—is still 10 years ahead of the field. Indeed, transputers are currently being used by NASA for its communications and radar systems. Much more important, they are being used by the Japanese as the basis of their new laser printer technology. They offer a unique parallel computing opportunity and unique abilities to interconnect with other systems. They are also one third cheaper than any comparable silicon chip mechanism.

For ideological reasons, as we all know, the Government sold INMOS, complete with the transputer, to Thorn EMI in 1984. Almost immediately, Thorn EMI decided to go out of computing altogether, and into music publication, which provided quicker access to short-term profits. INMOS was then put up for sale. Thorn EMI refused to invest any further in the factory in south Wales —at least, it refused to invest significant amounts in it— and showed absolutely no interest in making sure that the transputer was developed adequately. The Government —by this time, too late—stepped in and tried to persuade universities and others to use the transputer, but it was far too little, far too late.

Last week S.G.S. Thompson moved in and bought INMOS. Let it be on the record that S.G.S. Thompson is a wholly owned Franco-Italian firm and is less profitable, in overall terms, than Thorn EMI. But it could see a good thing, which our own Government and, I must say, our own industry—the industrial electronics giants—could not see. S.G.S. Thompson has promised to invest in the transputer—something that neither the British Government nor British industry was prepared to do. It has promised to recruit 100 new engineers, and, according to its new managing director, will put limitless investment in what he described as a jewel in the new technology area.

Is it not ironic that, in the very week in which, for instance, Fujitsu has said that it will launch a £400 million factory at Newton Aycliffe to assemble its computers and laser printers, the very week in which we have rejoiced at Toyota moving in to establish assembly plants in the north-east, we have sold one of our own world-beating inventions, and been relegated to the position of an offshore assembly?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point that the Government have sold a valuable public asset, which could and should have been developed in public ownership. I resent that very deeply. But then the hon. Member talks about a Franco-Italian company taking that asset over. But the United Kingdom is a member of the Common Market. Surely freedom of movement of capital, freedom for predators to go and buy anywhere, is a fundamental requirement of the Common Market, of which the hon. Gentleman and his party have made absolutely no criticism.

Mr. Ashdown: Absolutely, and I would be the last person to believe that a firm like that should not be available to purchasers in Common Market countries. As the hon. Gentleman will discover in a minute, I believe that the European context is essential if we are to be able to develop a decent high technology industry. My argument is not that a Franco-Italian company should move in and buy up; it is that it is extraordinary that, whereas people from France and Italy can see the advantages of a British invention, our own Government and British industry are

[Mr. Ashdown]

too blind to see them. I can find few more depressing examples of the short-term and myopic view of this Government.

There is, however, perhaps one—gallium arsenide, in many ways a sister to the transputer. It is a new high-speed chip.

Mr. Hayward: The right hon. Gentleman referred to gallium arsenide as a high-speed chip. It is not a high-speed chip. It is a product on which one can produce a high-speed chip. The right hon. Gentleman also described the transputer as unique. It is not unique. There are a series of competitors. I wish that the right hon. Gentleman would stop displaying his ignorance of high-technology subjects.

Mr. Ashdown: I am delighted to hear from the hon. Gentleman. He is wrong about the transputer. There is no equivalent to the transputer. One or two chips are now being developed which are transputer emulators, but they are not in the same league as transputers. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that, technically, gallium arsenide is not a chip. Without wishing to go into long and detailed explanations, let us accept the short term of a chip in the sense that it can at least fulfil many functions of high-speed computers which the silicon chip can perform.

What is unique about gallium arsenide is that it has several special properties. It is light-emitting, its architecture can be varied after it is made, and it is about five times faster than the conventional silicon chip equivalent. What is also important is that it was invented in Britain. Many people believe that it will replace silicon in high-speed computers and certain other applications.

In 1985, the advanced materials and devices committee predicted a world market for gallium arsenide of £9 billion. On 11 March 1985, I initiated an Adjournment debate, backing up that committee and asking the Government to support a programme to develop gallium arsenide invented and developed in Britain. I asked them to set up a structure similar to the Alvey committee to press forward the development of this British invention. That Adjournment debate was answered by the then Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East, who is now Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science. Hon. Members can look at columns 125 and 126 of the *Hansard* of that date. The Minister's answer was disparaging, to put it mildly. He described gallium arsenide as

"not an easy material to process."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1989, Vol. 75, c. 125.]

He described it as an "immature technology" when contrasted with the advanced silicon chip technology, and said that the development should be left to industry. He went on to state that the Ministry of Defence was investing some money in it, and he gave the impression that is would have only a Ministry of Defence application.

For the record, gallium arsenide is not now being made in Britain in any commercial quantities. Far from having only a Ministry of Defence application, gallium arsenide chips are at the heart of every compact disc player imported into Britain today.

However, Britain leads the world in some aspects of gallium arsenide technology. Last week I was at St. Andrew's university, where I spoke to Professor Sibbett. He has developed a specific, individual application for gallium arsenide which enables it to produce the fastest laser pulse in the world—so fast that the duration of the pulse in relation to the duration of a second has the same relationship as the duration of a second to the history of the universe. That is important. It will mean that we can develop extremely high-speed computers in future.

I looked at what the professor was doing, and as I left his laboratory one of his researchers said to me, "We have established a world record, and that world record has stood for four years. This will be the basis of new high-speed computers. I have absolutely no doubt that the technology will be bought out, used by others, and that we will import it in high-speed computers in years to come."

I now refer to gallium arsenide's sister technology. Gallium arsenide produces a light impulse. It is a fibre optic which will transmit light, not only in computers but around the country. Again, we have a technology that was invented in Britain—at the British Telecom laboratories in Marplesham. It carries a signal that is thousands of times faster than the conventional twisted copper pairs. The United States study said that in 1991 delivery and installation of fibre-optic cables would be cheaper than installing the twisted copper pairs that we currently have. We will see the development of speeds of transmission down fibre-optic cables increased by perhaps 20 times before the end of the century. The fibre-optic cable offers the possibility of a broad-band, interacting computer communications network for the whole of Britain, possibly reaching into every house.

Conservative and Labour Members seem to think that this is not an important matter. It will be very important. *[Interruption.]* I am glad to get some support from the Conservative Benches. Just as our Victorian forebears thought it right to construct an infrastructure of roads, railways and canals to carry the commodities to support their industrial revolution, so we will need a modern infrastructure to carry the commodity for our industry. That commodity will be information. A fibre-optic network will be as essential for our future industry, based on high technology, as were the railways, canals and roads in the past.

A great many people have considered whether we might invest in such an infrastructure. The Peacock committee said that we should; so did the Prime Minister's own advisory committee on science and technology. British Telecom appealed to the Government to help it do so. It said:

"All we want is some kind of horizon from the Government, so we are not planning against total uncertainty."

The French, the Japanese and the United States are doing it. The Germans are doing it like mad. Even the Labour party is now proposing that we should do it. I am told that the Labour party will suggest that this should be the centrepiece of its new industrial strategy. I am delighted that the Labour party is at last joining me in the two-year campaign to invest in the new industrial infrastructure that our nation will need.

The Government of course, have said that we should not do it. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members will have time to make their statements shortly. Mr. Alastair Macdonald, reporting to the Department of Trade and Industry earlier this year, said that the Government should play no part in this and that we should leave it to the market. I am not suggesting for a moment that the Government should find the £15 billion or £20 billion to

make all that investment, but they have a major role to play in stimulating private investment, in creating the interface standards that will allow it to work, in deciding how it will be laid down in Britain and in pump-priming the development.

Any belief that we can simply leave it to a free market and see it develop is nonsense. Under the Government, Britain will not get a modern, extensive, nationwide fibre-optic network. Therefore, it will lose the opportunity to use a British invention which would revolutionise society and provide new opportunities for self-employment and enterprise, for education in the home, for self-health care, for home shopping and for entertainment. The Government are turning their back on all those opportunities.

Is it not ironic that at the same time as the Government are turning their back on helping such systems to come into being, we launched, in January, a satellite television network capable of reaching into every home? What a tragedy that in Britain the telecommunications revolution will be used to give new opportunities to the powerful to shape our minds and to provide soap operas instead of new possibilities for our citizens to shape their destinies for themselves.

Behind all that we must accept that Britain's trade in new technologies has been seriously hampered not only by the United States Export Administration Act, but by the dead hand of the Co-ordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls. COCOM is a secret committee, it is not treaty-based and it seeks now to police the export of high technologies between the countries of the West and the Soviet Union. It has completely failed in that task. In many ways the Americans have sought to take unilateral action outside COCOM, which has nearly always resulted in giving American industries and firms —especially large firms—trading advantages over their British or European rivals. Frankly, COCOM's day has passed. The new developments in East-West relations mean that COCOM must and should be reformed. We should insist that COCOM is brought out into the open, that it is properly established on a treaty base and that it is worked on the basis that all the nations who are party to it will act multilaterally within COCOM instead of using their industrial muscle outside it.

So, here is the situation that Britain faces today. We are the only European nation whose inventiveness is falling behind. We are the only European nation in which the number of scientists and engineers in research and development is dropping. We are piling up a bigger and bigger deficit in the information technology trades. We are losing our share of even our domestic market. We are the only advanced nation to be investing less than we were 10 years ago in non-defence research and development. We are losing many of our best brains abroad. We are suffering from a massive and growing skill gap in information technology that probably covers 30,000 jobs today and will cover 100,000 jobs by about 1993. Fewer people are studying for computer degrees than previously and we have far fewer people in our universities than our competitors. We have a Government who know nothing and could not care less about information technology and about the creation of the new industrial base that Britain will need to badly for its prosperity in the future.

Of course, those conclusions are not new. They are all identified in the recent report of the Select committee on Trade and Industry. The Government have responded to them all in their response published in March of this year. I have yet to read a bleaker and more complacent document than that response.

What Britain needs urgently is a strategy for the new technologies, which will invest in research and development, which will invest in a remissible training tax to encourage firms to carry out their own training, which will invest properly in higher and further education, which will invest in a new technology infrastructure, especially in a fibre-optic cable network for Britain, and which will invest in the world-beating products that the country still invents in sufficient numbers.

The Government, of course, know nothing about the meaning of investment. They will leave it to the market. They will stand by and see this nation, whose prosperity and future now lies in building a high-wage, high-skill, high-investment, high-technology economy and industry, become instead a low-wage, low-skill, low-investment, low-technology offshore assembly plant for others.

Of all the indictments that can be laid against the Government, their failure to invest in the future is the greatest and the one for which we will pay the greatest price. That is why I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members, who see for Britain a better future and who believe that the Government have a role to play in building that future, will vote for the motion.

4.28 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Anthony Newton): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'notes the success of the Government's policies in creating a climate in which industry has achieved record levels of output, productivity and investment; welcomes the continuing increase in investment by United Kingdom companies in civil research and development; endorses the Government's policy of supporting collaborative research and development both in the United Kingdom and in Europe; approves the measures being taken by the Government to make education and training more responsive to the needs of industry and commerce; and welcomes the success of the United Kingdom in attracting advanced technology inward investment as a further indication of the strength of the United Kingdom economy.'.

Perhaps I might begin by observing—using a word that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) used once or twice in his speech—that there is something ironic in the fact that he should move his motion in such terms in a week that has seen the announcement of three massive inward investment projects by companies which are world names in information technology, in vehicles and in vehicle components—Fujitsu, Toyota and Bosch. The total of their investments is about £1·2 billion. The Opposition are well aware that there are many other investments quite apart from those projects. I mention those major examples of recent inward investment projects because, to put it mildly, they hardly suggest that some of the world's most successful industrial countries and companies share the essentially gloomy view that the right hon. Gentleman has thought fit to put before the House.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Newton: I shall happily give way, because if the debate had been initiated by the official Opposition we would have heard an even more mindlessly gloomy set of propositions.

Mr. Banks: There is an alternative Opposition Front Bench operating today and we and the Democrats are in complete conjunction in our views on this matter. Why is it that the only thing that the Minister can do is to claim great credit for the fact that foreign investors, especially from Japan, are coming to this country? Where is British investment? The Japanese are coming here in order to get a foothold in Europe for 1992 because they know that Britain is the most deregulated country in the whole of Europe. That means that it will be easy for them. They are using us as a doormat, and it is about time that the Minister started to say that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Think about the bridge on the River Kwai.

Mr. Newton: I shall think at least as much about the remarks attributed to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who spoke in, I think, the north-east yesterday. He effectively suggested that the north-east was becoming colonised by the Japanese because they are investing there. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman goes back to his constituents in the Ford plant at Dagenham and suggests that that is an American colony. Some of the major contributors to the British economy over many years have been foreign investors, overseas firms, whose contribution we immensely value. They have contributed a great deal to the British economy, and I do not know why it should be suggested that we should now turn our backs on them.

Britain and its employment and production would be the losers if we were to adopt the attitude suggested by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). He can come back at me if he wants to, but he should bear in mind that much of this investment would come to Europe anyway. The key point is that within Europe it is coming to Britain. If the hon. Gentleman would prefer it to go to France, Italy, Belgium or Germany, let him say so. If not, let him welcome it here.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is coming to Britain because we are a pushover. They know that our conditions of employment and employment rights are so deregulated that they can take advantage. The Government just lay down a doormat for investors from the rest of the world. The Minister spoke about Ford. There is a threat hanging over the future of Dagenham and the investment there. I went to buy a Ford car from Dagenham Motors because I thought that, as I live in the area, that was the appropriate thing to do. I asked whether the Fiesta that I bought was made at the Dagenham plant, which is right behind the showroom. I was told that it was assembled in Spain. What state are we coming to when we buy Ford cars in this country and then find that they are assembled in Spain and exported to Britain? That is palpable nonsense. Where is the investment in British industry, technology and skills? That is what we want to hear about.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman and I can agree on at least one matter, which is that 10 years ago there was not the remotest likelihood that any of these firms would have come to Britain. He describes the change from his own particular, rather curious, perspective. I described the change as one in which firms see this country as a good place in which to do business and as a good base for operations which, in one industry after another, are becoming increasingly international, for reasons which have nothing to do with the factors that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West has mentioned.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong to say that there was no inward investment 10 years ago. There was a lot of inward investment in all parts of the country, but the difference between this Government and the previous Labour Government is that the latter had a regional policy and tried to get investment in areas of high unemployment and to get industry where it was vital. Unfortunately, at that time a whole series of firms which operated in this country but whose decisions were made in Detroit and elsewhere were closing down.

Mr. Newton: Why?

Mr. Heffer: The Minister needs to know a little about economics, but I am not making a speech. I could explain to him in very simple terms the nature of the rotten system that he upholds, which has booms and slumps. If he does not understand that, he does not understand the ABC of economics.

I was the Minister of State for Industry for a period when we were getting that inward investment. It was precisely when inward investment began to taper off that we saw the end of the regional policy.

Mr. Newton: I am conscious of the previous unhappy experience of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). He should perhaps bear in mind two things. First, two of those same companies to which he has referred and to which I have not referred—I suppose that he had in mind, in particular, Ford and General Motors —have both in recent months, quite apart from the three large investments in the past week that I have already mentioned, made significant decisions to invest further in this country, Ford with its engine plant in Wales, and General Motors with some futher investment not very far from the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to recognise something else. Although it is for Bosch, for example, to say, rather than for me to tell the House, precisely what factors influenced its decision to come here, bearing in mind that it is a German company, I gather from my contacts with the company that two considerations that attracted it were the low rate of corporation tax and the good state of British industrial relations. That is why I say that 10 years ago there would not have been the remotest possibility, however much regional assistance had been offered to them, of those companies coming here.

A third point that I mention while I am seeking to deal with the hon. Member for Walton is the significance of Toyota's having decided to come here on a massive scale with no regional assistance at all, because it has not gone to such an area. That is a feature of some significance.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I would like to join my right hon. Friend in welcoming the inward investment that has taken place, but it is not only inward investment that we are seeing. In my own constituency in the past four or five years we have had both announcements of further investments and actual investment by, for example, Glaxo with £500,000 to be spent in Stevenage in the next four years and 2,000 people involved in research and development. Another 500 people are involved in research and development in Marconi Instruments with a new

factory development. Further development is going on in International Computers Ltd., part of the Standard Telephones and Cables group, in Stevenage. All this new investment is being made so that this country can be more prosperous.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood). He makes very well the point that, although there is a particular drama about so many large inward investment projects being announced in the past week, it is against the background of a widespread increase in investment of all kinds across virtually the whole of the British economy, both by companies overseas and by those business men here who have greater confidence in the country's economy than they have had at any time for a generation.

Mr. Skinner: That line of argument about inward investment would stand up much better if the Government had not been in office for 10 years. When they took office we had a marginal surplus on our manufactured trade; we are now down to a deficit on manufactured trade of about £20 billion and a balance of payments deficit of about £15 billion. According to the Chancellor, despite all the claims about inward investment, it is likely to get worse in the next financial year. If this inward investment is so good, beautiful and wonderful, when will the balance of payments return to a surplus?

Mr. Tony Banks: Where is the miracle?

Mr. Newton: If, for example, Fujitsu makes chips here rather than elsewhere, there will be an export and import substitution effect. The same is manifestly true of Bosch, Toyota and all the other projects that I mentioned. At the same time, they will contribute in various ways, both direct and indirect, to the further strengthening of the competitiveness of the British economy, and are part and parcel of the range of policies with which we seek to meet the needs to which reference has been made.

Mr. Banks: When will we move back into a surplus?

Mr. Newton: No doubt other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, and I wish to make some progress.

One matter on which both Social and Liberal Democrats and Labour Members sitting below the Gangway happily agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends is the importance of investment for this country's future prosperity.

It is striking that, although during the 1960s and 1970s the United Kingdom was near the bottom of the league by almost any standard of the substantial measurement of investment, since 1980 total fixed investment has grown faster in the United Kingdom than in any other country in the European Community. Manufacturing investment alone—I know how keen Opposition Members are on manufacturers—is estimated to have increased by no less than 9·5 per cent. between 1987 and 1988. All the indicators point to continued buoyant investment this year.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I am not trying to be obstructive, but, if that is the case, why is manufacturing investment now only back to its 1979 level?

Mr. Newton: I shall point to a fact that emerged in the course of my statement on Toyota, which I made to the House yesterday, when I was challenged about the degree of import penetration of the British motor car industry. I made the point then, and I make no apology for repeating it, that for most of the period since the Government took office there has not been a particularly satisfactory level of import penetration. It has been between 50 per cent. and 60 per cent.—but that was about the level which it had reached in 1979. Between 1974 and 1979, the level of import penetration doubled. It will take a long time to overcome the effects of such decline, its consequences for investment during that period, and the decisions that were then made.

Equally, investment in industrial research and development is increasing in an encouraging way, with an increase of about 26·5 per cent. in real terms—more than a quarter—between 1983 and 1987. It should be firmly registered throughout the House that it is against that background of a strong sustained increase in investment by industry that the right hon. Member for Yeovil has brought the motion before the House this afternoon.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that investment as a proportion of GDP—which is the proper way to measure net investment—is no higher than it was in 1979? The right hon. Gentleman accused me of being gloomy. Is he not gloomy about the fact that today our deficit in information technology is running at £2·19 billion a year and growing? Does he not find that a gloomy picture? Or does he think that it is wonderful?

Mr. Newton: I shall be coming to some of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about information technology, for I have no desire to dismiss them. I ask him to acknowledge, however, that after more than 20 years in which the economy suffered not only from its failure to invest as much as we would like but from growth in consumption outpacing, consistently and almost relentlessly, that of investment, there has been a dramatic turnaround in the past five or six years. The growth of investment has often exceeded that of consumption by as much as 100 per cent. That remarkable trend has addressed a long-term weakness of the British economy, and has helped to build up its strength for the future.

The right hon. Gentleman talked a good deal about the information technology and electronics sector. Although he considers that sector particularly important, and it helped him to make his case—or attempt to do so—I ask him not to ignore other aspects of high technology, especially aerospace and chemicals, which present a different picture.

No one should imagine that the labels "information technology" and "electronics" mean that those are the only high-tech industries with which the country needs to be concerned. In aerospace, for example, the United Kingdom's capital investment in 1986 was £220 million, up from £133 million in 1983. In chemicals, capital investment in 1987 was running at an annual rate of £1·4 billion, up from some £900 million four years earlier. Investment in aerospace research and development between 1983 and 1987 has consistently remained at a high level, while in the chemical sector R and D investment increased from £735 million in 1983 to £1·3 billion in 1987—a massive increase of 47 per cent. in real terms. In both those high-tech sectors, moreover, the country is running a trade surplus of over £2 billion.

Mr. Cryer *rose*—

Mr. Newton: I will give way once more, but then I must get on.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that the British aerospace industry has been so consistently under-funded that we have not been able, in conjunction with Airbus Industrie, to provide a range of planes to satisfy British Airways—which is now almost entirely dependent on Boeing, with its highly variable quality of production? Does he also accept that the only small to medium-sized plane, the British Aerospace 146, depends not on Rolls-Royce engines but on Avco Lycoming engines imported from the United States? Is that not a sign of our lack of investment in technologies that will need developing if we are to match Boeing and Avco Lycoming?

Mr. Newton: It is also significant that a considerable number of American aircraft in operation around the world use Rolls-Royce engines. Given the size of this country and of what might be called its domestic market, its achievements in industry are considerable and make a major contribution to our balance of payments.

For understandable reasons, the right hon. Gentleman chose to focus particularly on a different high-tech industry, IT and electronics. In his intervention a few moments ago he implied—indeed, he virtually made his view explicit—that it was self-evident that the United Kingdom should expect to have the manufacturing capability to meet all its high technology needs. He points to the trade deficit in the IT and electronics sector, arguing that it demonstrates a need to channel further investment into it. I noted that he did not refer directly to the point that nearly all the major countries of the European Community and the United States also have IT deficits, and therefore have not gone down the self-sufficiency path that the right hon. Gentleman implied.

Our country has a long history of involvement in research and, as many right hon. and hon. Members said, it has been the home of many great discoveries. It certainly has outstanding strengths in particular areas of scientific research and industrial technology, including many under the umbrella of information technology and electronics. When it comes to instrumentation control systems, for example, and to electronic capital goods such as radar, we had a 1987 trade surplus of more than £700 million. No country is, or is likely to be, a world leader in each and every area of high technology. It is an increasingly global market in which each successive generation of technology demands ever-increasing sums to be spent on research and development investment.

The United Kingdom—no more than the United States, Germany or Japan—will not be able to become a major force in every area of high technology. Therefore, in common with other developed countries, we have—rightly, in my view—tended to specialise in those sectors in which British firms have a world lead or the prospect of maintaining a strong position in an increasingly competitive global market.

Interestingly, it emerged from the speech of the right hon. Gentleman that information technology is used to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of industry and commerce, and that that is true whether the IT equipment concerned is manufactured in the United Kingdom or is imported. In his remarks the right hon. Gentleman adverted—almost as an aside—to the undoubted growth in the IT and electronics trade deficit, and to the fact that that deficit was associated with probably the fastest growing market in the world. That is itself an extremely encouraging trend. It is at least as important—it will be possible to argue that it is even more important—to ensure that IT is effectively applied in our manufacturing and service industries as it is that we ourselves should be a massive manufacturer of microchips or whatever. In revealing that the United Kingdom is one of the world's fastest growing markets for IT and electronics products, the right hon. Gentleman indicated one of our country's growing strengths and not weaknesses, as he sought to imply.

Mr. Ashdown: The right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the proper utilisation of information technology is vital. One thinks, for example, of the way that it has been used to make the textile industry up-market and more competitive. However, the fact remains that Britain is woefully under-equipped to make use of the capital goods that it is buying in to support that deficit. The Institute of Administration and Management's report of 10 July 1988 commented that unsophisticated users of information technology are six times more likely to suffer poor financial results. It went on to comment that that is exactly what we have in Britain today—due to inadequate training levels, an insufficient number of graduates, and in particular a deficit of 6,000 programmers and analysts. The underlying problem is that the Government refuse to invest in education so that we are unable to utilise the maximum capacity of even that IT that we are buying in.

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman, understandably, rapidly shifts his ground from concentrating solely on our production capacity in relation to IT and electronics. Now that I have made the point that applications of that technology are increasing, which is encouraging, the right hon. Gentleman turns to what he calls the skills gap. I shall refer to that issue later. However, I hope that I have carried the right hon. Gentleman with me in recognising that at least as important as the sheer scale of the production of any particular types of IT or electronics products in this country is the extent to which we make use of those products, from wherever they may come, in developing industry's competitiveness and efficiency.

Capital investment in IT increased by 44 per cent. in real terms between 1982 and 1986, and it is also a leading sector of investment in terms of research and development, with investment in 1987 of nearly £2 billion compared with slightly less than £1·5 billion in 1983. Clearly it would not be sensible to demand of United Kingdom firms that they invest in areas where they cannot compete effectively internationally. It would not be right, as the right hon. Gentleman claimed it would, for the Government to seek to determine where and how United Kingdom firms should or should not invest. That approach of picking winners was tried in the past. More often than not it ended up as the quickest way of picking losers and of sending a good deal of money down the drain. There is no substitute for firms having a knowledge and understanding of the market place determining their own production and investment strategies.

There will inevitably be areas of IT and of other industries where foreign firms have a competitive advantage and where United Kingdom companies will choose to buy from abroad rather than manufacture in this

country. That is an inevitable consequence of increased specialisation in the IT and electronics sector and of the need for every country to concentrate on comparative strengths. That is one reason why we welcome the overseas investment to which I referred earlier, which has been an outstanding aspect of this country's success story in recent months and years.

I emphasise the contribution made to this country by firms with which we are already familiar. IBM, for example—and it would be just as possible to talk about Hampshire being colonised by IBM as about the north-east being colonised by Fujitsu—with more than 18,000 employees, is the largest employer, producer and exporter in the United Kingdom's IT industry. In 1988 it exported goods and services worth more than £2 billion, running a positive balance of trade and making it one of the country's largest exporters.

It is encouraging that other world leaders such as Digital Equipment, Hewlett-Packard, Rank Xerox and Datalogic all chose the United Kingdom for their European headquarters. Their decisions are not just coincidental but are positive statements by business leaders of confidence in this country and in its role as a key player in information technology. As was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage, it is far from the case that our indigenous IT firms are not investing. My hon. Friend referred to ICL, which has spent about £20 million on its United Kingdom manufacturing ability in the past two years, while Research Machines, one of our smaller but growing computer manufacturers, made more than £5 million of capital investment over the same period.

The Government have also created a climate that ensures that firms are much better placed to invest in research and development. Manufacturing profitability in 1987 was the best since 1969, and industry increased its own funding of research and development by about 30 per cent. in real terms over the four years between 1983 and 1987. Apart from that growth in industry's own expenditure on research and development, the Department of Trade and Industry spent more than £500 million on science and technology in 1988-89, and it will spend a slightly larger sum in 1989-90.

I am not sure from the right hon. Gentleman's remarks whether he welcomes this, but the Government have shifted their balance of policies and moved away from what is known as near-market support for research and development to direct support to longer-term ventures more distant from the market. We are putting much greater emphasis on longer-term collaborative programmes of research between companies, and encouraging co-operation between companies and higher education institutions. Many new schemes to promote pre-competitive collaborative research have been launched in the past year. For example, some 11 programmes have been announced and several more will soon be launched on Link, with which the right hon. Gentleman will be familiar. Proposals for such projects are being generated at a healthy rate.

I was particularly pleased that the right hon. Gentleman clearly recognised the importance of international collaboration, especially with the aproach of the single European market. We are supporting the Eureka framework which goes beyond the European Community and is a pan-European programme to encourage industrially led projects with the European Community and other European partners; and, of course, we are supporting many European Community research and development programmes which are complementary to our own.

Everyone in the Department is actively encouraging United Kingdm organisations to take part in community research industrial research and development programmes. Within the framework of those programmes, United Kingdom organisations are taking part in between 50 and 80 per cent. of the projects, depending on the individual programmes, and have received between 18 and 20 per cent. of the total funding. That is not often sufficiently appreciated when people look at some of the figures to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

I wanted to make one or two further points about investment, but in view of the time, partly because I have given way several times, I shall move on to the other shortage on which the right hon. Gentleman focused particular attention—the need for training in various skills at various levels. Certainly the time when training could be regarded as a one-off spell between general education and work and when additional training was considered neccessary only when new machinery was installed is long gone. It is encouraging that so many employers in Britain consider training to be a continuous process that is essential if they are to keep up with their competitors at home and abroad. I assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that that shift towards ensuring that training is more widely accepted as an essential part of a firm's investment and development is being reinforced.

Clearly, not least because of the large increase in the use and application of information technology and electronics, there has been a need to increase the supply of skilled manpower. The surge in demand for IT skills that has accompanied the surge in the market for the processes and products has undoubtedly led to a shortage of qualified manpower. We have sought to respond to that in a variety of positive and constructive ways, although it is manifestly not a problem that can be overcome in weeks or months.

By 1990 the engineering and technology programme will have provided 5,000 extra places at undergraduate and postgraduate level, 80 per cent. of which are in IT-related subjects. That programme and the earlier information technology in higher education initiative have significantly increased the places available for postgraduate information technology training. This year, the funding to help polytechnics and colleges to develop their capacity for applied research has been increased by more than 50 per cent. The high technology national training initiative of the Training Agency provides high-level vocational training courses, the majority of which are in computing sciences and engineering, with an IT component. Currently, some 3,000 students benefit from that programme. Computing and IT is a compulsory element in all youth training scheme programmes.

Those are just some of a wide-ranging set of programmes directed at the very problem to which the right hon. Gentleman drew attention. Trainees on employment training will also be able to undertake training on information technology as part of their individual action plans. We are continuing to monitor closely the evolving pattern of demand and supply for information technology professionals through regular surveys carried out by the Institute of Manpower Studies on behalf of a number of Government Departments and agencies.

[Mr. Newton]

Finally, I should mention something which the right hon. Gentleman did not include in his speech—the range of measures that are under way to improve links between business and education, not least the wide-ranging plans by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment for the development of training and enterprise councils.

In addition to the need for improvement in the amount and nature of training available in certain places at certain times which is currently being addressed, too many of those programmes were not sufficiently shaped by direct and clear knowledge of the needs and requirements of businesses and business men. The move towards training and enterprise councils to ensure that training is more closely related to the needs that underlie this debate will, in the medium and long term, prove one of the most important and productive changes which the Government has sought to implement.

For reasons that are clear to the House and, I hope, accepted, I have taken a little more time than I had intended. I accept that much remains to be done to overcome the full effects of a longer and unhappy period of decline in many parts of British industry, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Against the background of recent investment decisions by British firms and those abroad, the change in the past 10 years should be considered genuinely encouraging by hon. Members on both sides of the House. More than at any time in a generation, Britain is investing in the future. We are investing in capital, in skills and in a way which will continue to improve the output, the competitiveness and the trading position of the British economy. While I accept that there is still more to be done, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept, as he did at the outset of his speech, that an immense amount has already been achieved.

5.7 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) on his choice of subject for our debate. I also congratulate him and his party on the wording of the motion, as far as it goes. I was also pleased that he is so eager to endorse the Labour party's next economic programme in advance of its publication. I look forward to his further endorsement when the programme is published.

In the 1989-90 Red Book, which I understand is more than just another document, the Government claimed:

> "As a result of sound financial policies coupled with supply side reforms, progress has been made during the 1980s".

I shall return to supply side changes but first I shall address the question of economic progress. In any test of economic progress, it would be reasonable to look at the indices of manufactured output, manufacturing investment, trade, employment, growth and even inflation.

Can what has happened in our economy in the past 10 years be called progress when manufacturing output returned to 1978 levels only in 1987 and manufacturing investment has still not yet returned to 1979 levels? In 1979, we had a surplus of £3 billion on our trade in manufactures, but we now have a deficit of £20 billion. That is reflected in the figures of key industries in our economy. For example, most households spend a large proportion of their income in the car industry, but there is now a £6 billion gap in trade. In textiles and clothing there is a £3 billion gap in trade and in electronics there is a growing gap, as we have already heard, of nearly £4 billion. That is also reflected in our share of world trade, which has fallen by 11 per cent. over the same period.

Can it be called progress when we have lost 2 million jobs in manufacturing industry over 10 years? Notwithstanding the improvements in employment in the past couple of years, which we all welcome, unemployment is still 35 per cent. higher than in 1979, even if we take into account the Government's new method of calculation. Can it be called progress when the north-south divide is greater than it has been at any time in the past 20 years? Can it be called progress when inflation on all indices has all but returned to the 1978-79 level? I remind the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster of the comments of his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer before the 1987 general election when he said that inflation was the judge and jury of the Government's economic policy. I wonder whether the Chancellor is still saying that. I wonder whether the Minister is saying that when inflation is increasing rapidly. It is now double the average in the EEC and is moving relentlessly upwards.

That depressing picture is the real monument of 10 years of Thatcherism. It has bequeathed to this generation and the generation of the 1990s a lower capacity to make things that we need to export and an inability to compete in the modern high-tech industries. We are now a ravenous pool of consumerism for the products of other countries. What will happen when the bubble bursts? Will not deflation be forced on us again? Will not living standards begin to fall and, with a time lag, unemployment again start to rise? All that will have been called progress during a time when we have had the benefit of £78 billion in North sea oil revenues.

Some people may argue that inward investment is a sign of good times. I am not saying that it is not welcome in some circumstances. However, an over-reliance on inward investment is surely an indictment of our industries' inability to invest in our future. I am not opposed to inward investment. As a Member for the north-east of England I realise the importance of Japanese investment to the north-east economy. However, we must recognise why the Japanese are here. They are not here because of any supply side miracle in the British economy. The senior management in Japanese companies will say why they are here. They want to be inside protectionism that they think might occur in Europe after 1992 and if they locate in a country in which English is spoken, they do not need to retrain their middle management in other languages. That is the real reason why Britain is attracting Japanese investment. I think that the Minister knows that that is so.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clywd, North-West): The hon. Gentleman is making disparaging remarks about inward investment. Did he listen to his hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) when he intervened strongly during the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's statement yesterday to point out the enormous benefit that Japanese investment has conferred on his constituency?

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. We are not opposed to all inward investment. We want a balance of investment in this country and a greater investment by our indigenous

companies. One reason why companies will not invest in the north is that companies currently located in the south cannot persuade their managements to go north. To companies from Japan, Korea or elsewhere the 300 miles between Newcastle and London and the 400 miles between Glasgow and London are immaterial.

We cannot rely exclusively on Japanese investment for major projects in the regions. If we do accept investment, it must not be on just any terms. We must remind ourselves that Japanese investment in the United Kingdom is for the benefit of Japan, not Britain. We risk becoming an adjunct of the Japanese economy, with all that that entails. We need our own economy, our own product development and our own components industry. We must develop using our own inventiveness, our own new industries and our own research and development. We need our own educational and training investment and we need our own industrial infrastructure. Without that, we will become nothing more than a low-wage, low-skill, branch-plant economy.

Some people have said that we are becoming a screwdriver economy and hon. Members know the danger involved in that. In prosperous times it might be all very well but in difficult times there is nothing for the screwdriver to screw. That means a reduction in output and an increase in unemployment.

Mr. Newton: I do not understand how the hon. Gentleman can make those comments about Japanese companies such as Fujitsu, Toyota and Nissan but not about IBM, Ford, NEC or any of the other major foreign investments that have been here for some time. Nobody in Dagenham talks about a screwdriver economy. Nobody talks about such an economy in Hampshire or various other places in which IBM is working. Nobody who has seen Nissan at work in the north-east talks about a screwdriver economy. Why should it be assumed that that applies to all new investment?

Mr. Henderson: I know that the right hon. Gentleman makes regular journeys to the north-east, but I hope that in future he will take a little more cognisance of what he is told. He will know that the people in the north-east remember the nature of the investment that came from the American economy in the 1940s and 1950s. Companies such as Caterpillar are no longer there. Caterpillar was a screwdriver company and when things became difficult internationally it pulled out. Many companies, including Massey Ferguson and Chrysler, have pulled out in that way. That is the real danger. We need a balance of investment. I am not saying that we should exclude all foreign investment.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman's argument with care. He said that we need a balance of investment. I am not suggesting that he believes that we should exclude foreign investment but is he suggesting that, for the Labour party, with the announcement this week, the balance has gone too far in the wrong direction?

Mr. Henderson: I am not saying that the balance has gone off the end. However, if in the future the only investment in parts of Scotland, the north-east and north-west is foreign investment, the economy will become so dependent on inward investment that when we are hit by an international recession those areas will be as badly hit as they have been in the past. Some areas, such as Wearside near my constituency, are extraordinarily dependent on inward investment. They will be the first to be hit if there is a world recession, and everyone connected with the investment knows that.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that a report commissioned by the Department of the Environment from the distinguished accountants, Peat Marwick McLintock, on the housing action trust in Sunderland said that there was no evidence of the Nissan plant having any effect on employment on the estates of Downhill, Hylton Castle, Red House and Town End Farm? The Nissan plant, which already employs 2,000 people and is adjacent to those estates across the A19, has had no effect on those estates, which have high unemployment. Is not part of the problem that because investment is not indigenous, it is highly selective where it employs?

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He knows that the problem arises in such areas as a result of skill shortages and the lack of proper training programmes over the past 10 or 15 years.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): If the Nissan plant is only a screwdriver plant, why do people need skills to work in it?

Mr. Henderson: I have been grateful for other interventions, but that remark is offensive. It is offensive to say that people who work on an assembly line have no skill. The hon. Gentleman should spend 39 hours on the Nissan production line and then make that remark.

Why is our economy in the shape that it is? I shall refer to comments made by people who know more about the subject than the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). Dr. Andrew Sentence, who is head of the CBI's trends and policies group, stated last July in the *CBI news:*

"High interest rates are a burden on business and are unwelcome at any time. However, they also affect companies, particularly manufacturers, through their impact on the value of the currency."

I met the chairman of a company called AWD, which is in the vehicle industry. The Minister is familiar with it and I hope that he will agree that it is a go-ahead company which has considerable prospects. It rescued Bedford Vans, but its chairman is saying that the company will not make the impact that he wants on the market until the exchange rate is industry-based. I recently met a director of Courtaulds in charge of its spinning division in Lancashire shortly before he announced the closure of spinning plants. He made it clear that the problem was not internal productivity but the exchange rate. He said that as long as it was geared to the City and not to the needs of industry, the company could not compete in the world market.

Economists once thought that if demand policies are appropriate the economy will be successfully steered, but history has reminded us that that is not the case. I agree with a speech that the Minister made earlier this year, in which he acknowledged that demand and supply side initiatives are essential. However, it is clear that the Government's policies on the demand side have been pro-City, pro-rich, pro-export of capital and anti-industry, anti balanced economic development and anti the interests of ordinary people.

I observe no supply side miracle. Our failure to improve the supply side is at the core of the problems facing us as

[Mr. Henderson]

we build up to 1992. The basic error made by the Government over the past 10 years is that they believed that if they bashed the unions, trimmed the power of workers and gave employers more punch, supply side problems would be solved. That is what happened to British Leyland, but could any hon. Member say that as a result it is a strong, independent company going from success to success? Surely the truth is different, as everyone in the industry knows. It failed to take necessary design, capital re-equipping and marketing measures. I am as pleased as any hon. Member that it is hanging on manfully, perhaps in hock to Honda, but everyone in the industry knows that the basic problem was not limited to labour. That lesson is typical of much that has happened to much of manufacturing industry.

We should now know that the supply side cannot be changed without investing in the future, yet we still spend less on research and development than the Germans, Japanese or Americans. As the right hon. Member for Yeovil said, if the military aspect is extracted from research and development expenditure, the problem is more severe. Is it any surprise that we are ever more dependent on Japanese-designed cars, electronics and engineering products? The Government cannot dodge their responsibilities, as the *Financial Times* said when attributing blame for the problem in an editorial on 14 March.

There will be no supply side miracle while training is so woefully inadequate. Our number of trainees has dropped from 23,000 in 1979 to 8,300 in 1988. Two thirds of British workers have no workplace qualifications, compared with one in five in Germany. Cuts of over £230 million were made in the 1989-90 training budget in real terms. Even in the service industries, about which the Department of Trade and Industry is for ever crowing, 14,500 young French people obtained qualifications in retailing compared to only 1,650 in Britain. Is it any wonder that the Engineering Employers Federation has forecast a deficit in mechanical engineering products in 1989, for the first time this century?

Is not the fundamental policy error of the Government that, unlike our counterparts in the Federal Republic of Germany, they are completely and ideologically hostile to collective and community action? We cannot make improvements in research and development, training, education and infrastructure unless we make a public expenditure commitment. Public expenditure should be accountable. The test should be the value of the service or product that it provides. However, I acknowledge that that has not always been the case. Crucially, public expenditure should be used to stimulate and complement private sector investment and initiative.

The Government know the perils ahead. They know that a further hike in interest rates will not only hit mortgages and further hamper industrial investment but will further exacerbate the trade gap. They know that the pound is likely to collapse when confidence departs and the hot money leaves our shores. They must know that 1992 is a further threat to our economy. If they are honest, they will admit that we still have severe supply side inadequacies.

Regrettably—I believe that the country holds this view—it is too late to change the Government's view. Some Conservative Members share the view of Labour Members that intervention is necessary and that we must invest to protect our future. Perhaps we will hear more about that from Wales in the coming week. I urge Conservative Members to join us in supporting the motion.

5.28 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): The title of the debate is fully in keeping with the slogan approach of the Social and Liberal Democratic party. It is long on good intentions and rather short on practicalities. I was privileged to represent Workington in the late 1970s and remember the workings of the Lib-Lab pact. I remember that almost any investment for the future was cut and cut again, so perhaps the House will understand my scepticism about the words of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) about investing in the future. I have a thought going through my mind that if he ever got near the levers of control the results might fall a little short of his words.

I am grateful that the House has the opportunity to discuss this most important matter, but I am disappointed in the number of hon. Members who are present to listen. Although I include hon. Members of my own party in that comment, we are more in evidence than hon. Members of other parties. We have some good spenders in this House, but we are a little short of earners. As a nation, we must earn money before we start spending it. This is a debate in which we decide how to earn money so that we can spend it on the social programmes the nation requires.

I want to talk about future investment in reducing our balance of payments deficit. In the short term, the Government's policy—which I support—is to have high interest rates which will bring down inflation and reduce demand. I am concerned that high interest rates will, in turn, reduce investment as well as demand. Even if that does not happen, I am equally worried about whether our manufacturing industry will be of a size and capacity to take advantage of the demand when interest rate falls. Will it be in a position to supply the goods that our people require when interest rates come down? I worry that that will not be the case. If I am right, we shall lurch backwards and forwards in a way reminiscent of the stop-go policies of the 1950s and 1960s, only this time we shall use the balance of payments as the crisis indicator.

I assume that it is desirable to bridge the balance of payments gap and to bring our balance of payments into equality; thus we should define the objectives to be achieved. It is a sad fact—every hon. Member who has spoken so far has made the point—that for some reason our manufacturing industries are poor in investing in three areas—training, equipment and research—when compared with industries in other countries. We can deal with the problem of the balance of payments deficit as a large cake, by taking slices out of it and dealing with each slice at a time. I am glad that manufacturing investment is now up to its 1979 level, but it is still low compared with the other G7 countries and we have to bear in mind the significant point that our investment is still some 50 per cent. lower than Japan's as a percentage of gross national product. However, I do not decry the increase in investment that has taken place, as so many Opposition Members have. It is a significant improvement and long may it continue. But we should have some idea to what

percentage of GNP should be reached in manufacturing investment if we are to work towards reducing the balance of payments deficit.

We must also have some idea what percentage of inward investment is desirable each year and work towards it. I have to smile when I see the disagreements between the two wings of the Labour party over internal investment. I welcome Toyota's investment in the north. It is a tribute to the changing attitudes and atmosphere that the Government have created that the Japanese are looking to this country for investment. I also admire the work done by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales in creating the infrastructure in Wales to attract companies to the Principality. I am not saying that the Government should pick winners, because the Government could not pick a winner if we paid them, but the Government can provide the infrastructure to make this country attractive to foreign companies for investment. I am told that during the last two years, the improvement in the balance of payments which will be created by those companies that have gone into south Wales in that period would mean a change of £10 billion to £15 billion to the balance of payments, if it were to be extrapolated over the whole country. That contribution should not be lightly brushed aside.

I know that some people are rather worried about internal investment and inflows of funds. I must point out to them that the most chauvinist nation of the lot in the European Community—France—has now, for the first time, revised its policy on internal investment and is going out of its way to attract more companies to invest in France, whereas before it was trying to keep them out.

Much has been said about training and the fact that for some reason our manufacturing industries have been poor in that respect. The recent initiatives of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment in putting £3 billion into training and bringing in manufacturing industry, which will contribute about £15 billion, will go a long way to bridge the skill gap. It is a funny quirk of human nature that although we have probably the most generous student grant system in the industrialised world, we have the lowest percentage of people going on into further education. That reflects a failure of the motivation of some of our schoolteachers. Britain desperately needs a trained work force to maintain its position in the industrialised world.

Again, we have a low percentage of GNP spent on research. Other hon. Members have already made the comment about the percentage given by the Government to defence. I would like the Government to look at defence as a separate item and see whether it is necessary for them to increase the percentage that goes into the civil side. Although our defence industries make a contribution to the balance of payments, one cannot eat tanks or grow rockets. That part of the economy should not be supported to the detriment of the civil side. The civil side should be evaluated on its own and should not be squeezed out in favour of the military.

I was generalising when I spoke about investment because certain sectors of society and industry have done exceedingly well. For example, the huge investment put into aero engines has produced results. Other hon. Members have mentioned our pharmaceutical and chemical companies. There is no doubt that money invested comes out in the fulness of time in profit, jobs and products. I am afraid to say, however, that as a general rule, the lack of skills and the lack of investment in research in our manufacturing industry has led our manufacturers to retreat into niche marketing. Niche marketing is profitable in the short term, but I remind industry, as I remind the House, that niches are a little like castles in 13th century Europe, in that they are soon overrun. We must consider the wider context.

I am reminded of the story, which I am told is true, of the ambassador to Washington at the time of the introduction of television. He was asked to do a Christmas broadcast which would be recorded in advance. The television crew arrived, the ambassador gave the broadcast and when he thought that it was all over the interviewer said, "What would you like for Christmas?" The ambassador replied, "Crystallised fruit." Come Christmas day, the ambassador watched the broadcast. All was going well until, at the end, the camera flashed to the French ambassador. When he was asked what he would like for Christmas, he said, "I would like to see an end to nuclear arms." The interviewer turned to the Australian ambassador who said, "I would like an end to the Korean war." He turned to the Indian ambassador who said, "I would like an end to world hunger." Hon. Members can guess the rest of the story. There is nothing wrong with crystallised fruit in a domestic context, but it does not have much impact on the wider world.

We must look to the targets presented within the European Community, the Pacific rim, the USSR, America and the rest of the industrialised world. We must see what we must do to expand our productive capacity and to build on our present success to achieve equality in our balance of payments. We must then target our objectives and, with Government support for the infrastructure—and the Government should not try to pick winners—we should go for it.

5.39 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am pleased that we have this opportunity to debate such an important subject today and that my party initiated it. One of our concerns in the past 10 years has been the weakening of Britain's competitive position. We must be able to pay our way in the world, and our failure to keep up with modern technology is beginning to come home to roost with a vengeance.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. Last year our major report considered Britain's position on information technology. We discovered that there was a remarkable paucity of information about the state of that industry. It was difficult to find out exactly what was going on. Therefore, much of our report was dedicated to asking the Government to play a role in ensuring that more information is available so that Britain can ensure greater participation in the development of that technology and, much more importantly, in its application and use.

Many of us have personal experience of modern equipment. If it did the things that the salesmen said that it would, we would be pleased with the service, but more often than not, it fails to live up to the expectations raised about it. That is basically because we are lagging behind in using that technology effectively and in developing its application.

That presents an interesting contrast with the attitude of our major competitors. When looking for information

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

on this, the Committee visited the United States and Japan. It is fair to say that what we saw in Japan scared us because the Japanese are channelling long-term investment into this area on a scale that leaves us gasping and the Americans terrified. If the Americans are terrified, there is no room for complacency in Europe or in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the Americans are so concerned that they have tried to copy some aspects of the Japanese approach in bringing companies together in research and development consortia to try to advance the technology and its application.

Our report also referred to the Government's role in advancing technology through their own procurement policy. However, that view was categorically rejected by the Government, who do not see it as a function of government. That is interesting, because it was explained that a significant component of the success in this area of Japan and the United States was brought about by their Governments' conscious use of their procurement powers to bring on technology. Although the British Government are facing severe competition from highly powerful and successful Japanese and American markets, the one thing that the Government have decided that they must not do is to follow their example. I cannot imagine a more stupid response to a serious situation.

The Select Committee looked at silicon valley, where there has been a wonderful upsurge of innovation and ideas in new product and new systems developments, but when one got to the bottom of it, much of the money came from the United States' defence budget. Although applications ultimately spin off into the commercial market, without being underpinned by defence spending, many of the ideas, products and companies, would simply not exist.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has already referred to the lack of research and development funding in areas apart from defence, although we do not have a defence budget that is in any way comparable to that of the United States. We must address that issue and ensure that there is some push from underneath as well as some pull from the market. One area on which my party and the Government agree is that the market must be the determinant, but the market alone will not ensure that British companies succeed in developing the new technology.

We must look for opportunities in new markets. There is no doubt that a single European market is an opportunity for greater co-operation and for developing a bigger market. From that market there is the potential to develop markets in the Third world and in the Eastern bloc. We should not lose sight of that because if the economic reforms in the Eastern block are successful, as all hon. Members hope that they will be, those countries will need the technology which we have but which they are a long way from being able to produce for themselves.

I make a specific plea—I hope that the Minister will address this point—for the British Government to press for a review of COCOM. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry called for that last week and our call was reinforced by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. The relevant extract of that Committee's report states:

"The Trade and Industry Committee criticised the unwieldy nature of the system"—

that is COCOM—

"commenting on the likely extent of trade opportunities lost. We share its view, and are sympathetic to its recommendations including 'an immediate and radical reduction in the scope of the Cocom list'."

I stress that COCOM needs to be able to expand as fast as technology changes. Too often we are in the ludicrous position of British companies being prevented from exporting technology which is already becoming obsolescent but which, because COCOM has not caught up with it, is still on the restricted list. In consequence, we lose market opportunities and eastern bloc countries lose the opportunity to develop their economic performance.

So that there is no misunderstanding, I make it clear that we fully understand the need for COCOM. We are not suggesting that it could or should be swept away because, of course, we must maintain our guard on defence and security. However, as we—the Select Committee on Trade and Industry—said and as the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs has said, COCOM does not apply simply to defence. It is becoming a significant and substantial restraint on trade. I hope that the Government will agree that that is something that the West, collectively, could usefully address.

Although I welcome the Labour party's support for our motion, the hon. Member for Newcastle Upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who spoke from the Labour Front Bench, tried to suggest that the Labour party was somehow ahead on this matter and that it would address itself shortly to a great and presumably revamped "white heat of technology" initiative. Unfortunately, the tenor of the hon. Gentleman's speech suggested that what was being put forward was some kind of "fortress Britain", which would be narrow and introspective. He failed to grasp the fundamental point that, if we are to be competitive in the market place, we must be in the market place and not protected from it. We agree that the market must be allowed to operate and that our companies must be able to respond to it. "Fortress Britain" may be a superficial populism, but ultimately it would destroy our industrial base by hiding it from the real world.

We believe that the Government have a role to play in ensuring that we have a level playing field and reciprocal arrangements with our non-European competitors, such as the United States and especially Japan, and in ensuring that the single market within the European Community operates evenly and fairly for all of us.

Mr. Kennedy: Like my hon. Friend, I welcome the Labour party's support for our motion, but does he agree that there is a fundamental contradiction in the Labour party supporting a motion that is substantially addressed to information technology issues which, by definition, technically cannot know any national boundaries because information technology is all about the international free flow of information, while at the same time alluding to pulling up the drawbridge around the British economy —which, as my right hon. Friend rightly says, would spell short-term disaster for our country?

Mr. Bruce: Yes, it would, but it also seems incompatible with membership of a single-market European Community. The Labour party does not seem fully to have come to terms with that yet.

We must ask how we can update, compete and keep up to date with new technology and how we can ensure that the new technology that we have will be fully and properly utilised. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry

concluded that we are a long way from taking full advantage of the capabilities of the technology and using it as effectively as we might.

We saw one or two examples of both success and failure. The most often quoted example of success is American Airlines, which introduced its own computerised booking system, involving all the American airlines, and found subsequently that that system actually made far more money than running the airline did—so much so, that the president of the company, when asked whether he would sell the airline or the system, said, "I will keep the system; the airline can go."

On the other side of that experience is the Bank of America, which managed to lose $2 billion as a result of failing to introduce a modern and effective information system. When we met officials of the bank, it had got rid of software experts and was trying to see whether it could correct the situation by employing hardware experts. I suspect that the latest reports are not all that promising. This area is very important to the United Kingdom. I think it is generally accepted that our financial services industry is strong, advanced and innovative and, therefore, has substantial potential. It is not perfect—there is no room for complacency—but it is one of our strengths. Indeed, it has been a traditional source of satisfaction to British Governments of all colours that, whatever the state of our balance of trade, our balance of payments in terms of invisibles was always in surplus. But there are some worrying signs that that surplus is reducing.

With the advent of 1993—almost a second, albeit international, big bang—there is some concern that British financial institutions may see the single market as something against which they have to protect themselves, instead of an opportunity that they have to exploit. I hope that the Government accept that they have a responsibility to try to ensure that when we get agreement on the single market it will be agreement that gives British financial expertise full access to that market. The Government must ensure that access is not restricted by barriers erected by other countries that want to protect themselves from our success. They must ensure that we can continue to develop the application of technology in the financial services area, to our own and the European Community's advantage.

Let me put this debate in perspective by saying that the subject is central to the current state of the British economy. The Government are perpetuating the myth that, in the 10 years since they came to power, we have had an economic miracle. There have been changes, and some of them have been beneficial. I am not arguing that they have all been bad, but I say very forcefully that it remains the case that in the Government's first two years a third of our manufacturing capacity was swept away. The Government's defence is that the firms that were lost were weak and were, by definition, unable to withstand the blizzard, and that the result is a leaner, fitter economy.

The trouble is that it is a smaller economy in terms of its ability to enable us to pay our way in the world. We are not paying our way in the world, and the current balance of payments deficit is a direct result of that policy. The position is getting worse, and is likely to get worse still, unless we can create the goods that the world wants to buy, with sufficient added value to enable us to maintain our standard of living. The signs are not good, and the Government's position is extremely vulnerable—and rightly so.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would concede that when this massive fallout in British industry took place, one of the principal factors involved was that British industry was very weak financially. After a long period of high taxation, it simply did not have the cash resources to tide it over. I should be interested to know what the hon. Gentleman can tell us about his party's views on corporate taxes. Does he feel that those taxes are at the right level now? Does he not concede that this Government have already brought them down to a level that puts them among the lowest in the world? Does he think that there would be more investment in research and development, in training and in capital items if this trend towards lower corporate taxes were continued?

Mr. Bruce: I shall be very happy to enter that debate if the hon. Gentleman can persuade the Government to give us time for it on another occasion. Let me ask him specifically why the Government have not been prepared to introduce tax relief for money invested in long-term research. That is a positive proposal that they could have taken up, but, so far, in 10 years, they have not done so. Radical changes of that kind could usefully be introduced. They might be positive and helpful. That is a direct answer to an irrelevant intervention.

There seems to be a myth that we are moving into a post-industrial era, that we have created a post-industrial society. Looking at our post-industrial society right now, one can define it as meaning short-term profit and long-term bankruptcy. This country cannot sustain 55 million people unless we make goods and provide services that can be sold in the world. At present, we cannot do that. That is the dilemma that we are in.

The consequences of this policy fall very unevenly within the United Kingdom. I do not intend to make a regional policy speech; I am simply pointing out that Scotland, Wales and the regions of England, which had predominantly manufacturing economies, have suffered disproportionately as a direct result of this change. It is not good enough for the Government to proclaim massive investment in shopping centres as some kind of substitute. Indeed, I think that the building of massive shopping malls on what once were the sites of great industries is actually a symbol of the monumental misjudgment of this Government. Those shopping malls are selling goods manufactured outside the United Kingdom, goods that we do not have the resources to buy. We must find ways of ensuring that at least some of those sites go back into manufacturing. We must ensure that our manufacturing capacity, our manufacturing base, is enlarged. But the Government have no answer to that problem. Indeed, the decline continues.

This is one of the things that they might have made a virtue of. Over this period we have faced progressive and successive privatisation. The Government learn slowly. Initially, and fundamentally, privatisation was simply a means of getting their hands on finance quickly in order to buy votes with the taxpayers' money. One cannot dispute that in that policy they have been successful, but they have suffered because, in the process, they—the free-market Government—have actually privatised monopolies. They have privatised inefficient monopolies, centralised monopolies, inflexible monopolies, and the ones that were privatised earliest have failed to take full advantage of the

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potential for technological advance and market development because they have been protected from the market by the strength of their monopoly.

British Telecommunications may have been profitable, but it has been profitable because technology has been moving fast enough to reap the profits from the customers. But its speed of innovation has been much lower than the speed of innovation in telecommunications systems in other parts of the world. That is greatly to Britain's disadvantage.

We argued at that time that it was a great pity that the Government did not establish, for example, Scottish Telecommunications, which could have been autonomous, and might have developed its own technology relevant to the Scottish economy and the more sparsely distributed population of Scotland. It might have developed something with export potential. It might have been possible to develop new products and new services. Incidentally, the same goes for Scottish gas or Scottish steel. Of course, in the case of electricity that is already the situation of Scotland, but it could be done in England as well.

Mr. Page: Is not the hon. Gentleman completely misleading the House? When the industry was under nationalised control it was a crying shame that investment was not being put into it. The country simply could not afford it. Privatisation resulted in the investment of £2 billion, enabling British Telecom to make huge advances. In the past, the system was being held back by nationalisation.

Mr. Bruce: It was being held back by the Government's public sector borrowing requirement, which, in any case, we never supported. I have always regarded that as the most spurious argument of all. Right now, the Government have a huge surplus, and there are nationalised industries that could make use of it. Indeed, so could the education system. But the Government will not release that surplus, even though the investment would be non-inflationary, would create jobs, and would underpin the wealth of the country in the future.

Mr. Ashdown: My hon. Friend's last point is at the centre of the argument about the Government's irresponsibility in the matter. We can have a theological argument about whether privatisation or nationalisation is good, and a practical argument about whether it is good for British Telecom. But there can be no doubt that no firm in Britain would not distinguish between capital and revenue. What an act of irresponsibility it was to get the money from the privatisation of BT and others and then to spend it paying off this year's bills, instead of reinvesting it in the future.

Mr. Bruce: It was worse in the early years. Tax cuts were used to buy goods which were made outside the country, and that aggravated the problem. That is the crux of the matter, particularly now that the Government have some resources. We must plough those resources into investment—the Government's responsibility is investment research and development and training—and the private sector must be given a climate in which it will invest in product development, innovation and new technology. Unless we can do that and add substantial value within the United Kingdom, we will face disaster.

In 10 years, people will realise that, far from an economic miracle, we had a reckless Government who used simplistic assumptions that took a once great manufacturing nation to the brink of bankruptcy and were financed only because they had the windfall bonus of North sea oil, which is now evaporating. We are heading for an awful lot of trouble. Unless this kind of motion is not only passed but acted upon, unlike our European competitors, post-1993 Britain will feel a nasty, cold draught.

6.1 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): The motion is split into two parts. The first half is critical of the Government, and the second half puts forward a series of suggestions. It is unfortunate that the speech of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was not also split into two parts. He spoke for 38 minutes, and he criticised the Government for 38 minutes. He made not one positive suggestion, with the exception that we should do away with COCOM. He had to withdraw that comment, and the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) clarified it in terms of reforming COCOM.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil used the word "past". He also mentioned in passing the levels of investment. It was one of the thinnest, if not the shallowest, speeches I have ever heard from an hon. Member in opening a debate. He was wrong on gallium arsenide, transputers, and fibre-optic cables in terms of their use by Mercury and BT in docklands, and so on. He could not even get right the constituency of the Minister who replied to his Adjournment debate some years ago. When I challenged him on the brain drain, he had to revert to passing bets, which is a rather childish way of providing information to the House. It was a travesty of a speech, which took 38 minutes of what should have been an important debate.

Much more interesting was the contribution by the hon. Member for Gordon. He made a series of positive suggestions. I agree with several of his suggestions about the long-term requirement to turn round the economy, and the need for investment in various sectors. However, I disagree with one or two points. Obviously, one is his assessment of the long-term future of the economy. Given that the motion refers to education, I was interested also to examine the capital investment which took place in education from 1973-79. During much of that period, the Government were supported by the hon. Gentleman's party. Between 1973-74 and 1978-79, the level of capital investment in education, particularly in schools, fell by 63 per cent. We are now paying, in terms of the shortages of systems analysts, computer programmers, engineers and the like, for long-term under-investment, particularly by a reduction of 63 per cent. in investment in schools over less than five years.

I wholeheartedly concur with a comment in the *Social and Liberal Democrats News* of 7 April this year. It states: "his utterances on this topic only give weight to growing disenchantment with his leadership."

In terms of the requirements that we face for the future —not for the past, as the right hon. Member for Yeovil said—it is significant that there was no suggestion of a long-term SLD policy. I should have thought that we

could have heard of one during the right hon. Gentleman's speech. I presume that we will hear about one when we debate another motion.

Several of my colleagues have referred to inward investment and the internal investment that is now being undertaken by companies within this country. I am pleased to note that the level of investment as a share of GDP is now higher than it has been for the past quarter of a century. I agree with those hon. Members who said that investment is still not high enough, particularly in respect of a commitment to civil and research development. On that point I agree with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). He referred to inward investment by Toyota, Fujitsu, and Boch. In terms of the competitive nature and the achievements of major companies in this country nowadays, it is significant that, on the same day that Toyota announced its investment in Derby, GPA announced that it would purchase Rolls-Royce engines for every 757 that it included in its order. It is significant also that, in this day and age, an order of £1·5 billion—that is, in round terms—for the British aerospace industry can be hidden on back pages because of other levels of investment.

We should not deny the successes. Equally, we continue to face challenges. For example, the concentration on information technology and telecommunications, upon which much of the debate has focused, is highlighted by the decline in our share of telecommunications exports. About 25 to 30 years ago, we exported about 25 per cent. of all telecommunications equipment to other industrialised and non-industrialised countries. That figure has fallen year in and year out for about a quarter of a century. Our share of telecommunications exports is now down to about 5 per cent.

GPT, in the form of system X, is showing substantial progress in its capacity to compete. The problem is that, while it is trying to develop that product, the world's major competitors among telecommunications manufacturers such as AT and T, Northern Telecom, Ericsson's, Siemens and the like are moving on to the next phase of switchgear, and the investment required by GPT to develop that next phase is not available. Therefore, it is actively looking—whether willingly or not—to tie up with Siemens or some other company. We must recognise that problem in long-term industrial developments in this country. It requires not only investment but a changed attitude by management to training.

For far too long, British management has been unwilling to commit any money to training anybody over 21. The supposition is that once they are over 21, they are trained; they will learn on the shop floor, office, drawing room or whatever, and that is it. British management must commit far more money to investment in training. It must be willing to take individuals off the shop floor year in, year out, and upgrade their expertise. The vast majority of foremen in German and French industry are graduates. They are required not only to turn over the line and ensure that it continues to produce, but to solve problems on manufacturing lines on a day-to-day basis.

British management should adopt a similar attitude. If it does not, it will fail to survive, despite some of the successes that I have identified. For example, it must improve its links with universities. We have some of the best universities in the world. One of the few points on which I agree with the right hon. Member for Yeovil is that although they produce excellent ideas, those ideas are not taken up by British industry but go to other countries to be developed.

Mr. Kennedy: I agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made. Why does he think that happens?

Mr. Hayward: Because of the attitude of British management before and after the last war that British industry had captive markets. After that, the attitude was that the state would support industry. I do not think that anyone would accept either of those attitudes as correct. They are not the attitudes adopted by German companies comparable to GEC, such as Siemens and Nixdorf, or by Japanese companies such as NEC and the like. Those companies invest heavily in universities. They fund substantial sections of university courses in a way that British companies have never done. Therefore, there is not a natural feed from the major educational establishments.

It is interesting to note in my part of the country that Hewlett-Packards is investing in Bristol where it is close to a major concentration of higher education. It believes that if it puts money in, it will get expertise out. That is the attitude that other British companies should adopt.

I am conscious of the time; therefore, I shall abbreviate my comments. I want to address to the Government one comment not made by other hon. Members. We need to change the attitudes of all aspects of British society, including the Government. Over the next 10 years the Government should be more nimble on their feet. They should look towards the possibility of reducing the burdens of government. We have too many layers of government. Why not do away with counties? They cost money. Why not do away with a number of London boroughs by merging some of them? The burdens of government put an imposition on industry. It is a cost that we could well do without. The Government should not only ask other people to respond but should also be much more nimble than they have been in previous years.

6.12 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I suppose that the speech by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was never going to be a highlight of the parliamentary year or even of the parliamentary week, but it was not even a sidelight because it was so dim and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) said, so lacking in substance. Perhaps the SLD members knew what was coming because only five of them stayed for the duration of the speech—a sure reflection that they had been tipped off about the quality of the debate on this major Opposition day.

Listening to the new "chips with everything" SLD lack of policy, I thought of a comment in the *Evening Standard* attributed to the right hon. Member for Yeovil:

"Mine's a selective memory. I find it's continually getting rid of things, a bit like a computer when the ram is full."

As I listened to his speech, I thought that the single K ram of the right hon. Gentleman was obviously well overloaded. The chemistry was poor, confusing a substance with a type of computer, the fibre-optics were short on fact, and the statistics were lamentable.

The House was told that investment as a percentage of GDP was static. Yet this country has just been through several years of dramatic growth in investment. As we have already heard, investment is at a record level for the

[Mr. John Redwood]

1980s. Investment is well above the low level under Labour and under the famous Lib-Lab pact of which we used to hear so much. The House does not hear much now about the successes of the Lib-Lab pact. We have new record levels of investment overall and very high levels of investment in the private sector.

Then the House was told that the country was weak in information technology. We had highly selective examples from someone who does not seem to understand the width and breadth of the industry that is established in this country. The right hon. Gentleman should visit silicon glen or the Thames valley to see the range and depth of the businesses that have been set up by individual entrepreneurs, local businesses and national companies. We have had a large influx of investors from all over the world, aware that this is the country in which information technology is flourishing in many branches.

Next we had the incorrect research and development expenditure figures. Hon. Members might have thought that in a speech centred on research and development, particularly Government R and D, the right hon. Gentleman would get the figures right. If we take neutral and fair comparisons in the OECD figures, we find that they show clearly that, in Government research and development expenditure, this country is above the levels of the United States, Germany and Japan in total. If the right hon. Gentleman insists on taking the percentage of GDP spent on civil R and D, again the story is that this country is above the levels of America and Japan.

The deficit in the 1970s and 1980s compared with the best countries abroad was in the private sector. The reason was the profit collapse engineered by the economic policies pursued by the Labour and Labour-Liberal Governments of the 1970s. The Conservative Government's economic policies have rebuilt and are rebuilding profitability. As profits have risen, so has investment in R and D. I am sure that the trend will continue while profits continue to prosper. I welcome the growing strength of R and D in the private sector which should add weight to the high level of GDP in public expenditure terms compared with our overseas competitors.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil made a narrow speech based on many errors. I do not think that it was the kind of speech that will bring back Mr. Meadowcroft with his splinter Liberals. I cannot even see it bringing back the Isle of Wight Liberals who do not like trading under the new banner. It might not even keep happy the hon. Members for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) who now sit on the part Bench that is normally reserved for the SDP and who, I am told, are getting rather nervous about defence policies and some other aspects of policy. In the battle of the minnows, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) is in a different class; his performance is much better than that of the right hon. Member for Yeovil. If only we had heard the policies of the SLD, we would have known about the pro-inflation policies that the party would like to pursue. We would have heard about high rates, extra local government, an extra level of regional government and the local income tax—all anti-enterprise policies that would cost the people dear, but, fortunately, will never happen.

Turning to the positive side, I welcome the way in which industry is investing in the country and is beginning to develop in the flexible manufacturing areas new technologies and a new emphasis on quality, on product development and on better management-employee relationships. I think that that will be followed with much wider employee shareholding and employee participation in profit-sharing schemes and the like. The new high-tech and high value added economy requires greater co-operation, based on a shared belief in profitability, investment, incentives and the like. All those are happening as a result of the policies pursued by the Government.

There is an area where industry and the Government can achieve more through investment which will help the enterprise revolution and the improvement in the domestic economy—the way that property is used in development. The House has already heard criticism by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) who does not like to see old industrial sites replaced by new commercial development. I do, if the result is a new factory, built to modern standards with high quality equipment, as it often is, or better shopping facilities, where people can enjoy the fruits of their prosperity and buy the goods and products that they wish to have. I see nothing wrong with a process of renewal from which we can draw encouragement as it progresses.

Many industrial companies see the advantage of redeveloping sites by building new high technology factories to meet the right requirements for emission controls and the recycling of heat and power; they are providing good working conditions for employees and are responsive to the new product design of the new economy.

Those things can flow from well-chosen property developments, which can provide the wherewithal and which can develop the new economy. The forest of tower cranes around many cities is evidence that that process of renewal is now under way. Some companies could do more, and I hope that they will turn their attention to it.

The Government sector, too, could do more. In that area the PSA—for which the DTI is not directly responsible—could do a great deal more to release land and buildings and to encourage the process of renewal. That would not necessarily involve any cost to the public sector, because of the surplus in that estate. The total estate is mind-boggling in size—some 10 million sq m. I would estimate that at least 5 per cent. of that—or getting on for 5 million sq ft—is surplus to requirements and could be disposed of. That would release land and property for redevelopment which could further power the enterprise economy. In addition, there are about 100,000 acres of surplus land in the civil estate where the Government could make further efforts to ensure that it is put on the market and released for enterprise redevelopment.

The Government, when deploying their departmental staff—in the DTI and other Departments—could recognise that rentals, for example, in docklands are £25 per sq ft, yet in Westminster and the west end they are £50 per sq ft. For the price of a short tube or water bus journey, people could be better accommodated at half the rental cost and the process of renewal could be developed, because many central London office premises occupied by Government Departments would be suitable for refurbishment, redevelopment and redeployment as the new economy gets under way.

Generally, the economy is performing well and the process of investment is gathering momentum. That process will continue if enterprise policies are pursued fully and if the wider opportunities afforded by a general common market in the run-up to 1992 are grasped and the principles of liberal trading firmly bulwarked in those proposals.

I have heard nothing from the Opposition that implies that there needs to be a great change of Government strategy towards investment. All that has ever been said about investment by the Government has turned out to be true—if business is given its head, if profitability is rebuilt, and if enterprise is supported, investment will follow through. It is high time that the property and the estate of the Government sector were brought up to the same modern standards as the rest of the economy. In so doing, surplus capacity could be released that would make money for the Government and would further the enterprise revolution.

6.22 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I congratulate the Social Democrats on their choice of subject for the debate, on the wording of their motion, much of which I agree with, on the performance of their leader—in which he appears to have lost interest himself—and, above all, on the brilliance of their timing.

The Government have a good story to tell and, if there is a good story to tell, nobody tells it better than my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Certainly, in real terms the Government have managed to maintain the value of investment. Of course, that is nowhere near enough. We have only to glance around us to see how lamentably inadequate is the investment now taking place, or planned for the near future, in our roads, railways, city centres, hospitals, education, health and our whole built environment. Those of us who are members of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs are aware of the depressing contrast between the preparations being made on the French side of the Channel tunnel for communications to the tunnel, not necessarily passing through Paris, and the timid preparations that are being made on the British side.

What is more, the Government appear to make things worse by dragging their feet in all too many of the collaborative enterprises in Europe. I thought that the Prime Minister in that famous Bruges speech made the point that Europe should concentrate on doing the things that we could do better together than alone. However, the Government do not appear to be living up to even the good bits of the Bruges speech. Our record in the European Space Agency, for example, is lamentable. We are being left out. I listened with some joy the other night to Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, who described Britons arriving at the railway station just after the train had gone, grumbling loudly that they did not mean to catch the train anyway, changing their minds, dashing down the line, humping a suitcase in each hand, blessing their lucky stars that the train had stopped at a signal, clambering on board and then complaining that all the seats in the dining car were full.

Of course, the timing of the debate serves to focus attention on the experiment, in quite a different approach to those things, in Wales, where a by-election is taking place. The investment in the environment in Wales, the improvement of communications, the encouragement of research and development and the allocation of enough taxpayers' money for infrastructure improvement—so that they attract much larger sums of private investment—have been part of the approach ever since Lord Crickhowell very wisely did a U-turn in 1979 over the preservation of the Welsh Development Agency. It had been marked down for instant destruction after the 1979 election, but Lord Crickhowell did a U-turn and it was allowed to run on. Admittedly, it had to adapt itself radically in the process. That has been to the huge benefit of the people of Wales and to the unconcealed envy of hon. Members from neighbouring English areas.

Under Nicholas Edwards, as he then was, Wales enjoyed an unfair share of investment projects and major developments, such as the gigantic Cardiff bay project, which will make Cardiff one of the most attractive cities in western Europe.

The present Secretary of State for Wales has taken the process of using public money to create beautiful infrastructure, which sparks off huge private investment, a giant step further. The difference is that he boasts of doing things which his predecessor coyly admitted doing. The difference is more important than a mere difference of phraseology. It is important in the climate that has resulted in Wales, where we have local authorities of all political complexions, trade unions and employers working together in close partnership, which would be labelled in other parts of the country—and by some of my hon. Friends—as "corporatism" and consequently derided. I prefer to call it the human face of capitalism—a capitalism which works well and is in tune with the Welsh temperament. At all events, it brings in the bacon.

A report in *The Sunday Times* on 16 April 1989 said:

"Tomorrow Walker will announce that Bosch plans to build a £100 million motor electrics plant promising 1,200 new jobs at Miskin near Cardiff"—

surprisingly—

"right on the border of the Vale of Glamorgan constituency."

It went on:

"Bosch will be the latest, and one of the biggest, examples of foreign undertakings in Wales . . . Wales has enjoyed a string of new investments since he took office after the last election . . . Beginning with the location of a Trustee Savings Bank office in Newport at the end of 1987, bringing 2,000 new jobs, it continued with the huge investment at Ford (£726m)"—

the biggest engine plant in Europe—

"expansion of a string of Japanese factories in north and south Wales, and the arrival or expansion of merchant banks in Cardiff."

There has not only been new manufacturing industry but financial services, too. The report says that the Secretary of State

"has also increased the budget of the Wales Tourist Board to encourage more visitors to the valleys, while urban renewal is going ahead in black-spots like Abertillery, Tonypandy, Crumlin and Tredegar."

That all adds up to quite a programme.

It was reported that the Secretary of State asked:

"Where else in Britain is so much action taking place to improve the economy?"

I can answer that question from my experience, because in my constituency there are such developments. Some of them are more modest and some are a bit controversial, such as the development of a magnificent Victorian castle to provide a home for the National Portrait Gallery. That is not just a great artistic enterprise, but is serving as an attraction for discerning investors and employers who

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

fancy setting up high-grade technological industry or provision for financial services in the area. It makes an extremely attractive complex. Public money has gone into that, but sometimes the taxpayer or the ratepayer receives large dividends in terms of good jobs.

There is altogether a new spirit in Wales, a new readiness to stop squabbling, which is our favourite hobby when there is nothing better to do. Now there is something better to do, and Wales under Walker is getting it done. I suspect that before long the results will be visible.

6.30 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I thank the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) for a delightful speech. I have returned this afternoon from visiting Barry in the Vale of Glamorgan constituency. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the need for an enlightened and constructive public contribution and for co-operation between the public sector and private investors in the infrastructure and communications. He sounded almost as convincing as our excellent candidate, Frank Leavers, at the by-election press conference this morning.

We hear that not many Cabinet Ministers will traipse through the Vale of Glamorgan. They are rather thin on the ground and that is because of the current differences between the Secretary of State for Wales and the other members of the Cabinet on economic policy. At least the Secretary of State for Wales has a friend in the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West. It was interesting to note the long faces and dry expressions of the Minister and some Conservative Back Benchers as the hon. Gentleman delivered his enlightened speech. I cannot share his optimism about what will happen on 4 May. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that the Welsh love Walker, but I suspect that people in the Vale of Glamorgan will think that they are voting about Maggie.

Mr. Redwood: Many of us supported our hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) in what he said about combined public and private investment. Did the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) go to the Vale of Glamorgan to try to bring off a last-minute alliance with the SDP?

Mr. Kennedy: That was certainly not my purpose. I am not a business man, but I can recognise bad investments when I see them.

The hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) spoke about my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of our party. My right hon. Friend was absent for a short time during the speech of the hon. Member for Wokingham. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have noticed that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was scarcely present for the debate after he finished his speech. We make no complaint about that because we accept that ministerial duties have taken him elsewhere. *[Interruption.]* I am grateful for the fact that the Chancellor of the Duchy is conducting the debate rather than the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs. The hon. Member for Wokingham was slightly wide of the mark in his criticisms.

My right hon. Friend blinded the hon. Member for Wokingham with science. That is self-evident. We read and hear a great deal about the hon. Member for Wokingham. He is said to be the great white hope, the next intellectual guru, shortly heading for the Front Bench where the Minister is lounging nonchalantly with his feet on the Table. If that is the level of attack that we can expect from Conservative Members who are to be moved in the direction of the Treasury and the Dispatch Box, there is considerable hope for the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Wokingham used such revealing phrases as "things are getting much better because investment is gathering momentum." That is lawyerspeak for the fact that under the Government investment has been in a hell of a mess for a long time. He and his hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) spoke about skill training and education. As both hon. Members went to some lengths to cast doubt on the figures that we have put forward, it is worth rehearsing the figures again. In his speech my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil spoke about investment in science and technology research and development as an estimated ratio of non-defence-related research and development. We have not heard that adequately rebutted in speeches by Conservative Back Benchers any more than we have heard an adequate Government response to last year's report by the Select Committee on which my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) served.

When one compares Britain with its international competitors one gets confirmation of what we have known for a long time—that in many fields Britain lags woefully behind Japan and the emerging Pacific rim nations in the economic co-operation that is developing there and in the European Community. That is not about to change as a result of anything that we heard from the Minister who had nothing new to offer. However, the matter goes further than that. It is in the universities that much research and development have their seedcorn. I should like to deal with the attention that Britain gives to that.

A study of metalworking in Germany and Britain compared the qualifications of German skilled workers and people in the British work force. The results were quite horrendous. In 1985, 55,000 West Germans were trained and received craft qualifications in mechanical engineering. In Britain the figure was 10,000, which means that more than five times more people qualified in the West German economy. In terms of academic qualifications, Britain now rates 17th out of the top 20 OECD countries in the participation rate of 16-year-olds in full-time education. In Japan 95 per cent. of students stay on beyond the age of 16, but in Britain only 32 per cent. do so. No wonder our economy is having international difficulties.

In debates on education we have heard that in higher education we continue to send a far smaller proportion of our 18-year-olds into the tertiary sector and on to university than is the case in the United States, Japan, the Netherlands, France, Italy and West Germany. The list goes on.

Mr. Richard Page: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that we have a more generous support system for our students in further education than any country in the industrialised world?

Mr. Kennedy: That is about to change too—if it is the case. I hardly think that that is a major Back-Bench argument in favour of Government policy. That is about

to change in the tertiary sector, and our revamped training schemes could hardly be said to be generous or productive in achieving their stated objectives for young people. The Government and Conservative Members should look again at the legacy that they are leaving this country.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does my hon. Friend accept that in the Secretary of State's Green Paper on student finance the international comparisons showed that European countries that provide the highest level of support for students with taxpayers' money also have the highest participation rate by post school leaving age students? Therefore, there appears to be a direct international correlation between investment by Government in students staying on at school and their attainment. If the Government go along the road that they are going along, we are likely to see a reduction in opportunity rather than an increase.

Mr. Kennedy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. His pertinent point illustrates the sentiment expressed by the leader of our party when he spoke about our need to move from low quality industrial assembly to a much higher quality industrial product. In reply to the hon. Member for Kingswood, may I say that that requires far more positive encouragement of the role of university departments. While he was right to speak of attitudinal problems in Britain since the second world war, any country that is serious about developing skills, technology and a resource base would not allow some university departments to go to the wall, as ours have, or be substantially reduced in their efforts and ability because of the squeeze on education expenditure of the past 10 years.

The Government's general approach in this debate is similar to their approach in many other matters. They speak of how things are picking up or taking off or are so much better and they always use as their base line 1981 or 1982. They want us to forget the first two and a half years of their administration when we had savage deflationary policies of a type with which the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West would be most uncomfortable and in which he would find little to commend. Not the least of the deflationary measures was the 1981 Budget, the consequences of which we have been living with ever since.

When Conservative Members say how much things are improving, I can only say that if one hammers any industrial base low enough, when it begins to recover from its contraction any level of growth will show up per capita far more than it would if a more adequate manufacturing, resource and technology base had been maintained. It is for ever an indictment of the Government that they manifestly failed to achieve that in their earlier days in office, so their present success is tempered by the damage done as the result of their general economic approach.

It has been extremely useful that the Social and Liberal Democrats have raised these issues this afternoon, touching on not just many of the broad economic arguments on trade imbalance and so on but, in particular, those "forefront" technologies where, as an island and, historically, a trading nation but also as a nation of declining fossil fuels and one more closely linked to the European Community—a trend that will continue beyond 1992—Britain must find a new competitive industrial role for itself internationally. Much of that will rest on the younger generation and on the technology that will dominate their lives to an even greater extent than at present and soon the research and development, employment and industrial productive opportunities that such technology gives rise to.

Although I welcome the fact that the Labour party will vote for our motion this evening——

Mr. Hayward: Some of them.

Mr. Kennedy: Some of them will, yes, and I welcome that. But although the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) the only Labour Member who spoke in the debate, welcomed the fact that we seem to have something in common in our attitude towards the Government, a lot more modernisation of attitude is required of the Labour party towards these issues before it can claim with any credibility to occupy the political ground, the terra firma, occupied by our party when we argue for the importance of new technology, the greater emphasis that must be given to research and development and the excellent result that we anticipate because of that in the Vale of Glamorgan.

6.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): Before we go any further, we must remind ourselves that this is an Opposition day, its eighth allotted day, although, looking round the Chamber during the debate, in what I was going to describe as the ebb and flow of debate and now think that "gentle gurgle" would be a better description, I noticed that, on my counting anyway, for most of the time there were present one Member from the official Opposition Labour party and two members of the SLD. There was also one Member from the SDP.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I have sat here since half-past four this afternoon—*[Interruption.]*—and I have been bored to bloody tears most of the time. I have also done a bit of counting. At one time there were only four Conservative Members, and one of them was a parliamentary private secretary. Had there been a vote earlier, the Labour party would have won it, because we had more hon. Members than the rest put together.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon). I did say that it was an Opposition day. It is not unreasonable for us to expect the Opposition to pay more attention to it and take it more seriously. It was worth making that observation so that we could get the importance of the debate fully in context.

In the early stages of the debate the argument revolved around the state of the economy. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) spent some time describing an economy that I was quite unable to recognise. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) followed on the same lines. I was much more attracted to, and identified more readily with, the description given by my hon Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who was acknowledged by Opposition Members to be one of the intellectuals and rising stars on the Government Benches.

My hon. Friend was able accurately to describe the development of the economy over the past few years in a way that seems to have escaped Opposition Members. It is a source of continuing sadness and regret that every time we have a debate here, Opposition Members seem to want to describe our economy in such a way that it would not

[Mr. Forth]

attract any investment from abroad or inspire any confidence from members of our own society. The truth is that Opposition Members are in a state of confusion, not to say schizophrenia, about this. What I should like to know is whether all Opposition Members, particularly in the Labour party, agree with the early-day motion, in the name of three of their hon. Friends, welcoming the arrival of the Toyota car assembly plant in Derbyshire which, it says, will create many genuine, new and meaningful jobs for the people who live in the county and help re-establish it as a centre of industrial development. Some speeches by Opposition Members did not give that impression. I hope that at some point we will have an indication of what Opposition Members think about this influx of investment which fully reflects the confidence of the Germans and the Japanese in our economy—a confidence that Opposition Members may not share.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am grateful to the Minister for paying regard to the sedentary comment that I made earlier about the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) being regarded as one of the intellects of the Conservative party. Perhaps the hon. Member for Wokingham will put on record his own sedentary response that he was "the only one".

If the Government are as keen to attract investment as the Minister says, is that helped or hindered by the present high interest rates?

Mr. Forth: The present level of interest rates does not seem to make a material difference either to internally generating investment, which is at a record level, or to the level of inward investment by companies from other countries.

We have had to make interest rate adjustments to deal with inflation, about which the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said many times that he is unhappy and with which he is dealing. Nevertheless it has neither impeded nor hampered the rate of investment, domestic or from other countries, and the development of the economy.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North said that, without an alteration in the exchange rate—he did not specify either direction or level—many industrialists would be increasingly unable to do business. That seems to be at odds with the experience of the German and Japanese economies which have both—against a very strongly appreciating currency—performed superbly well in exports over many years. If a business is successful, and has a good product which it produces to a high quality, it will export, even over a strong exchange rate parity. The exchange rate bolt hole is no longer available to those who want to take refuge there.

I shall deal with one or two of the points made by the right hon. Member for Yeovil, who, in his lengthy contribution, dealt substantially with information technology. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) pointed out in his trenchant way that he felt that the expertise of the right hon. Member for Yeovil was—let me say—questionable. I use that word because I am in one of my more polite moods.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil was quite wrong in two or three respects. He talked about gallium arsenide —with which I know the House is familiar. About two years ago the Department of Trade and Industry announced the availability of about £25 million for collaborative projects with industry, under the heading of gallium arsenide. It is a matter of great regret to the DTI, but it is true, that that money has not been taken up in full by industry. There have been regrettably few projects. The companies in the private sector—the experts who know what they are talking about—did not see fit to take up what the Government offered. Time and again we see that pattern reflected, and time and again the matter is ducked by Opposition Members. If the Government offer support, but the private sector—the wealth creators, profit makers and experts—do not see fit to take it up, there is not much more that the Government can do.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman is obviously referring to the Plessey experience. However, did not the Government's committee on advanced materials recommend a programme of not £25 million, but about £300 million to help the development of gallium arsenide? When the Government finally moved, did they not do so too little, too late? When Plessey tried to use that money to get back into the market, it discovered that it had been taken away from abroad. Plessey has had to withdraw substantially from developing an invention that could have been ours to produce, instead of ours to buy in from others' production.

Mr. Forth: I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's analysis. I have given him the facts. If a product is as good as he claims this one is, the window of opportunity will be greater than he has suggested.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil expressed a galactic view on fibre-optics. He came to the House waving something which was halfway between a wand and a panacea—I am not sure which is the most appropriate. He suggested that a universal network of fibre-optics, reaching into every home, so that we could shop electronically on broad band frequencies, would be the saving of the country. However, the right hon. Gentleman failed—as Opposition Members always do—to spell out in detail why that should be done, where there was a demand for it and, much more important, who would pay for it.

In the glib way that we have come to expect from the right hon. Member for Yeovil, he referred to pump-priming, but he did not say which pump was to be primed, to what extent or by whose money. I suspect that, inevitably, it will be taxpayers' money. Those who know what they are doing and have the resources to do it—principally British Telecom and Mercury Communications—have already started to develop such technology and are installing it where they think it appropriate.

It would take 15 years to achieve that which the right hon. Member for Yeovil seemed to suggest could be done in the twinkling of an eye. This is one of those fraudulent proposals which sounds good if it is said quickly, and even better if nobody is told what it will cost, and purports to produce some magical transformation in the economy. However, that will not happen.

Mr. Ashdown: In his disparaging remarks, the hon. Gentleman criticises the Government. They have done exactly that which needs to be done within the confines of Northern Ireland, but not for the whole nation. They have taken the lead in saying what should be established and what the interfaces should be, and showing industry how

it could play a part in the investment. If that is good enough for Northern Ireland, why is it not good enough for the whole of Great Britain?

Mr. Forth: That is not what the right hon. Gentleman said earlier. He is talking about interfaces—whatever that means in this context—and about giving guidance. We are always giving guidance—we give it frequently. However, we shall not endorse the right hon. Gentleman's proposal, or the bandwagon on to which Members of the official Opposition have climbed, to produce an unspecified, all-singing, all-dancing network at an unspecified cost.

Mr. Henderson: Is the Under-Secretary aware that British Telecom wishes to introduce fibre-optics, but, under the terms of privatisation, is unable to do so? It seeks changes to its constitution to allow it to do that. It also seeks Government funding, which most countries recognise is necessary if fibre-optics—an important new technology—is to be introduced.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman, no doubt unintentionally, misleads the House. About 550,000 km of fibre-optics have already been installed. Therefore, he can hardly claim that we are preventing British Telecom from doing so. Discussions are continuing on the best way forward and the nature of the relationship between British Telecom and the Government. It is unfair to suggest that we are blocking the sensible and correct advancement of fibre-optics in a way that can be supported by proven consumer demand. We do not support a pie in the sky approach.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) was the only member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry —or, certainly, one of the few—to participate in the debate. I was slightly surprised that more members of the Select Committee did not attend. I thought they might take the opportunity to expand their thoughts on the matter. The hon. Member for Gordon did so very well.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To be fair to the members of the Select Committee, they are on a visit to Edinburgh and Manchester investigating the impact of the single market on the financial services. I have broken my visit to participate today.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman's priorities are absolutely right. I am not surprised to hear that his colleagues are fact finding. Some of the hon. Gentleman's points were important and it is important for the House to understand the nature of the difference of views between the Select Committee and the Government. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, there is a genuine difference of view.

The Select Committee was looking for what the Department sees as a more interventionist approach than the Department of Trade and Industry is prepared to support. In particular, proposals were made about the role of an information technology Minister, the pull-through concept on information technology and Government procurement.

The Government have taken quite the opposite view. They have stressed over and over again that individual Departments and sections in the Government should be given greater autonomy and freedom to make their own decisions and are, therefore, able to enter a competitive market and buy what they think best for their needs. This old-fashioned idea of the gargantuan dinosaur of Government, directing the sector by procurement policies, is, I regret, typical of Select Committee members but not modern Government policy. There is no point in disguising the fact that there is a difference of emphasis and the Department has a different view from that of the Select Committee.

The hon. Member for Gordon also made a crucial reference to the use of information technology. He made a good case for American Airlines. However, he missed the fact that that involves the area of use. I invite the hon. Gentleman to study again the Government's White Paper which replied to the Select Committee's report. We emphasised that we wished to get the use of information technology on a proper basis and were prepared to help and assist in its understanding and best use. That is not the same as trying to pretend that, in this country, we can compete in every sector of the industry, which is a point that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy made earlier. We shall continue to make the distinction between encouraging proper and effective use of IT throughout the industrial sector and pretending that we can compete with every economy in the world.

As my right hon. Friend said, it is worth emphasising that, while there is no doubt that we have a deficit in certain areas of information technology, we share that with most other developed countries in the OECD. Most countries in western Europe and the EEC have such a deficit, although Japan has not. None of us has managed to beat the problem. I am not saying that this is necessary or excusable, but we have all found it very difficult to deal with and have yet to come up with a complete solution.

This has been a useful debate, although, regrettably, rather thinly attended at times. We have heard some thoughtful contributions, mostly from Conservative Members and we shall certainly consider them when we study today's speeches.

In view of what has been said, I strongly urge hon. Members to support the amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 67, Noes 197.

Division No. 166] **[7 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham	Grocott, Bruce
Alton, David	Haynes, Frank
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Heffer, Eric S.
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Henderson, Doug
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Hinchliffe, David
Beith, A. J.	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Bell, Stuart	Johnston, Sir Russell
Bermingham, Gerald	Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Boateng, Paul	Kennedy, Charles
Buckley, George J.	Kirkwood, Archy
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Leighton, Ron
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Livsey, Richard
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Clay, Bob	Maclennan, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Madden, Max
Cohen, Harry	Mahon, Mrs Alice
Corbyn, Jeremy	Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Cryer, Bob	Mowlam, Marjorie
Dixon, Don	Mullin, Chris
Dunnachie, Jimmy	Parry, Robert
Eastham, Ken	Patchett, Terry
Fearn, Ronald	Pike, Peter L.
Flannery, Martin	Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*	Quin, Ms Joyce
Godman, Dr Norman A.	Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Golding, Mrs Llin	Richardson, Jo
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*	Ruddock, Joan

Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wall, Pat
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Malcolm Bruce.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Dorrell and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes the success of the Government's policies in creating a climate in which industry has achieved record levels of output, productivity and investment; welcomes the continuing increase in investment by United Kingdom companies in civil research and development; endorses the Government's policy of supporting collaborative research and development both in the United Kingdom and in Europe; approves the measures being taken by the Government to make education and training more responsive to the needs of industry and commerce; and welcomes the success of the United Kingdom in attracting advanced technology inward investment as a further indication of the strength of the United Kingdom economy.

Care in the Community

7.13 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the Government's lack of policy and action on community care; believes that projected demographic changes call for a long-term strategy to cover the many types of care that an elderly population will require; further believes that the proposals contained in the White Paper, Working for Patients, will diminish the effectiveness of family practitioner services and the future provision of community care; and calls for the necessary funding to be made available to allow the health and care services to expand and develop in a way which will contribute to freedom from ill-health and freedom to live life to its full potential through providing packages of care that recognise the needs of the client, the family and informal carers within the community.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Fearn: For many years, we have heard a great deal of Government rhetoric about care in the community, but we have not seen any Government action to make that concept a reality. The Wagner report, the Firth report and the Griffiths report were all virtually ignored for no other reason but that their recommendations did not fit Government ideology. Another reason for delay is the realisation by Ministers that community care, which they adopted as a means of reducing hospital and community service costs, will not relieve pressure on the public purse.

Uncertainty about future organisation and finances means that planning for community care services has come to a standstill. It is now extremely urgent that decisions are taken. Confusion over areas of responsibility, accountability and funding, which has worked to the detriment of those in need, cannot be allowed to continue. The Government must respond.

I do not hold out much hope that the Cabinet working group chaired by the Prime Minister will come forth with proposals that will meet the requirements that the majority of those involved in community care believe are needed. A proper system of care in the community requires a commitment to provide adequate funding—a commitment of a kind for which the Prime Minister is not renowned. Also, the recently published abysmal results of a year's work by top officials conducting the National Health Service review do not inspire confidence in the Government's ability to produce workable and acceptable solutions.

How such a supposedly widespread review and reform of the Health Service can be completely void of any reference to community care, particularly when the proposed reforms would have a direct and disturbing effect on community services—as was pointed out in our recent booklet, "Dead On Arrival"—is beyond me. It transpires that "Working for Patients" has little to do with patients and more to do with costs. I hope that the members of the Cabinet working group on community care will not make the same mistake. When they consider the proposals, I hope that they will keep uppermost in their minds several basic concepts.

Among them is the necessity to put people first, recognising the rights of carers and their clients as individuals to exercise a degree of choice and control. Others are the right of the individual to live life to the full and the provision of support, including financial support, to carers and their clients so that those clients may live within the community as long as they wish, while recognising the rights and needs of their families and of other informal carers.

There must also be created a genuine partnership between clients, carers, the state, and the voluntary and private sectors. Finally, there must be provided a network of services giving carers and the individual client a package of support best suited to his or her needs.

Government inaction is not the only cause for concern, because continual pressures on and incentives to health authority managers to close down mental health facilities have had awful consequences. Thousands of mentally ill people are discharged from hospital without alternative care arrangements being made for them. The past 10 years have seen the loss of 40,000 beds. Some of those people have been made homeless and are wandering the streets, while others find themselves under the jurisdiction of the courts and prison services. Many others are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation without any support from the medical or social arms of the public services.

The neglect of the mentally ill is an appalling indictment for a country that claims to be civilised and increasingly prosperous. At what cost is our new-found affluence? Any community care legislation should embody Griffiths's statement:

> "No person should be discharged without a clear package of care being devised and without being the responsibility of a named care worker."

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does my hon. Friend accept that in the inner cities—which are meant to be the focus of Government policy, investment and attention—there is increasing pressure on right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House because of the large number of patients discharged from long-stay mental hospitals into what is allegedly care in the community?

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is not only in the inner cities that that happens.

Mr. Hughes: My right hon. Friend says that it happens not only in the inner cities, but in general that is where former long-stay mental patients are being discharged into the community in enormous numbers. It is a community in which no care is provided upon their arrival, and in which acute problems of mental illness and sickness afflict not only the patients themselves but their families and the immediate community, with no prospect of any help being provided.

Mr. Fearn: That occurs not only in the inner cities but in every town and city and in rural areas. The Schizophrenia Fellowship's drop-out centre in Southport is overflowing, and the staff have no idea where to send people who have nowhere to stay at night.

We must accept that individual clients and carers have some right to chose the care that suits them. It may be that short-term or long-term residential care is required. Therefore, it should always remain an option and should be available through private, voluntary and public provision.

Community care debates often place emphasis on the elderly. We are an aging nation. We are also a nation that is not coping with the present needs of elderly people. How can we expect to cope in future unless those in authority recognise the problems and plan for them? Today, single

[Mr. Fearn]

elderly people and couples who can no longer fend for themselves, and some who are incontinent, unable to feed themselves or in need of non-urgent medical attention, receive very little support in the community because the social services are short of staff and resources due to Government cuts.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Government cuts, and in his opening remarks he criticised the Government for failing to provide adequate resources. Will he cast his mind back to a document he wrote last July in which he called for annual increases of 2 per cent. in spending on the National Health Service and compare that with the Government's record of a 4·5 per cent. increase in real terms?

Mr. Fearn: I not only stand by my suggestion for a 2 per cent. increase in real terms, but stress that community care has received very little assistance. Health authorities are reluctant to take on elderly people in case they find themselves in a Catch-22 situation. Some hospitals will admit patients, but as soon as an assessment establishes that there is no medical need or that hospital treatment has been completed, the patient is discharged, regardless of the home situation and without continuity of care. The financial squeeze on health authorities has resulted in a reduction in the number of places in nursing homes they are willing to finance. The rigorous conditions of DSS regulations mean that one must impoverish oneself before any fees can be paid, and the recent ceiling on fees paid by the DSS, which makes no allowance for the wide variation in property prices, has made the availability of residential and nursing home care a matter of privilege, particularly in the south-east.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I represent an area where there are many residential nursing homes. Only recently I have received letters from the proprietors of those homes desperate about the increase in fees, and letters from residents desperate about the lack of an increase in their allowances. Those homes are becoming unable to continue to retain DSS claimants and they are being forced to make a choice between breaking even and continuing to care for those patients.

Mr. Fearn: My hon. Friend is quite right. In his constituency of Truro and certainly in other areas, nursing home proprietors fear that sooner or later the crunch will come and they will have to decide whether to discharge the people in their care. I know from their organisation that that is not what they want and that they will resist it for as long as possible.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): If things are so bad, why do so many organisations wish to start nursing homes and rest homes?

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is the get-rich-quick syndrome.

Mr. Fearn: I do not believe that it is the get-rich-quick syndrome, as my hon. and learned Friend suggested, because I believe that there is a great deal of care in the nursing homes and associations. Such institutions require help. Voluntary organisations are also finding it extremely difficult to operate within the DSS ceilings, and in some cases that leads to desperate situations.

Mr. Carlile: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although there are some splendid private nursing homes, by and large the best quality nursing home care is provided by local authorities which can provide the most flexible nursing home services? Does he agree that the way in which private nursing homes are changing hands for massive sums of money suggests that an element of the get-rich-quick syndrome is at work?

Mr. Fearn: I certainly agree with my hon. and learned Friend's first point about local authority nursing homes. I have visited many homes throughout the country and they are run extremely well.

If we cannot look after our elderly people now, what of the future as the number of people over 75 and over 85 increases substantially, as does their rate of dependency? The Royal College of Nursing estimates that an extra 10,000 places in residential nursing homes would need to be created every year for the foreseeable future to cope with those demographic changes. That figure is calculated from an assumption that only 4 per cent. of the elderly population will require such care. That percentage is below that for other developed countries. Currently, between 21 and 22 per cent. of people over 75 suffer from various forms of dementia and require 24-hour nursing care. If that rate continues—there is no reason to suppose that it will not—there will be 80,000 to 100,000 more dependent people by the year 2000. Who will plan for their care?

In a society which is increasingly mobile and transient, in which moving to another part of the country to retire is becoming the norm, it should not be left to local government or health authorities. It is, and will be, a national problem. A Ministry for community care which has strong links with local bodies should be responsible for overall strategy planning and development of care for the elderly.

In the past few years there has been a programme of closures of hospitals for the mentally handicapped, and the resettlement of mentally handicapped persons into community-based services. The care of those people often requires high levels of staffing and specially trained staff. As those skills are not always readily available in the community, some transfers have been unsuccessful. There will always be a hard core of people in every category who require special, specific and highly skilled care. We must ensure that, whatever the arrangements for community care, they are flexible enough to maintain the quality of life of those people.

Much of the debate on community care is concerned with cost, but it is a sector that may never be truly costed simply because of its very nature and the different levels of care and support required and provided. It is also clear, as Griffiths states, that most people do not consider that an effective system of care in the community can be conducted on the cheap. Whichever way community services are organised, there is already an apparent need for more social service staff and an increase in training. If local government is to be the lead agency, which I very much doubt, given the Prime Minister's fear of allocating too much to local authorities, an intensive training and retraining programme may be necessary. If community care is to be truly effective, it must be given the resources to match its needs.

The availability and quality of care services should bear no relation to the individual's ability to pay. The proposals that I hope the Government will introduce very soon will

be scrutinised very thoroughly to ensure that there is not a two-tier system of community care, as is the case in the NHS review.

It is evident that many people who are in need of care would not be receiving attention if it were not for the informal carers. The majority of carers are women. There are more married women staying at home in Britain today to look after elderly relatives than there are staying at home to look after children. Not all those in need of care are elderly and there are many informal carers looking after people who are mentally ill, mentally handicapped or disabled.

The stress of the continual dependence is often made more difficult by the added financial pressures. Many of the informal carers are elderly and some have already spent years bringing up a family. Thousands are now at breaking point. As a society we are in danger of creating more difficulties and increasing the number who may become dependent unless we begin to look after our carers.

The act of caring must be a positive choice, for that immediately relieves some of the tension and stress. In all areas we must provide more day centres, day and night sitting services, short and long-term respite care, transport and other support services. Above all, it is time we recognised the value to the community that is provided by informal carers. To relieve some of the burden and widen the area from which carers may be drawn, the Social and Liberal Democrats would like to see the Government introduce a carers benefit.

Community care is a complex issue and there are many subjects I have not covered, including the plight of the disabled. Some of their difficulties and some of the problems facing the elderly could be relieved by the full implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. I call upon the Government to implement that Act in full. Also, without further delay, they should bring their proposals for community care to the Floor of the House so that they can be debated and acted upon. A year ago Sir Roy Griffiths said:

"doing nothing is not an option."

Since then the problems have increased and the longer the Government delay, the more desolation, distress and degradation will be suffered by those in need of our services.

Primary care is not altogether a distinct and separate subject from community care. After all, the general practitioner is situated within the community and is responsible for the quality of health care available to the community. The proposals contained in the White Paper and associated documents will be damaging to the quality of primary care services. I am not talking about self-governing hospitals of general practice budgets. I believe that those are non-starters and that they will have little take-up. The damage will be done by the central plank of the proposals, which is the introduction of competition in the belief that it will lead to improvements overnight. To achieve competition, doctors' pay is to be increasingly linked to the number of patients on their list. To sustain income, doctors will compete with each other for patients with supposedly improved services and publicity. Yet it is strikingly obvious that an increase in the number of patients will result in less time being spent with the individual. Time is needed to discover the underlying cause of disease.

The practice of preventive medicine and health promotion at individual patient level requires time for consultation and discussion. There will be no time to visit schools, factories or other sectors of the community to spread the health promotion message. The increase in list size will make home visits increasingly scarce and, once again, those most in need, such as the elderly, will suffer most. Doctors in rural areas and in some inner cities will find it impossible to increase their list size. That will make practice work untenable or, at least, unattractive. Patients will face a reduction in services and in some areas the loss of any general practice medical service. That is a heavy price to pay merely to satisfy the Prime Minister and the supporters of the free market philosophy.

The Government have acknowledged the problem in Scotland and introduced separate proposals to safeguard rural practices. Perhaps the Minister will use this opportunity to explain to those who live in sparsely populated areas in England and Wales how their services will be protected. He does not seem to think that the problem ever warranted a mention in his recent letter to most hon. Members, which was dated 14 April and which I received today. Dr. Farrow, the chairman of the rural practices committee of the general medical services committee, has described the proposals as a "devious blow" which will

"probably result in the rape of the rural practice."

That quotation can be found in the *British Medical Journal* which quoted his speech at the British Medical Association council on 1 March.

The proposals contained in "Promoting Better Health" and "Working for Patients" are unacceptable and, in their present form, will diminish services rather than develop them. The future of rural communities and services is at risk. The Minister must address those concerns positively.

Our anxieties about the quality and range of services are further exacerbated by other Government proposals. The set requirement to spend 20 hours in the surgery at first seems innocuous. However, it will cut down the amount of time that some doctors can spend visiting their patients and in the community. In rural areas, the distance between split-site surgeries, the travelling time required to visit patients and patients' transport difficulties are real problems that the Government have failed to address.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: There is a particular concern about the hours requirement for doctors who also work in hospitals. The main district hospital in my area is located in the middle of my constituency and many of the doctors are involved in hospital work. They are faced with either withdrawing their services from the hospital or being penalised for not meeting the hours they are required to serve in the surgery. That is an immediate and real dilemma. Perhaps the Minister will be able to respond to it.

Mr. Fearn: That is a good point, and I hope that the Minister will respond.

Also unworkable and damaging are the terms that apply to the proposals on prevention and immunisation. Leaving aside the issue whether those should be the subject of incentive payments, the Government have set targets that are ideally correct but unrealistic in practice for many doctors. Parents are often unwilling to have their children immunised and, in inner-city areas where the population is

[Mr. Fearn]

transient, none of the screening or immunisation targets is ever likely to be met. Many doctors will stop providing the service altogether rather than experience the hassle.

Each practice has a very different mix of patients and problems and each health care provider should, working to certain standards, have the flexibility to provide the service best suited to the area. The rigid guidelines that the Government are attempting to impose will be harmful to the development of good practice.

Medical audit and peer group review is welcome in theory, but unless it is accompanied by the necessary level of funding and support it will be a non-starter. Unless doctors have the staff and computer back-up required, they will become medical bureaucrats and accountants, tied to their desks shuffling endless bits of paper while their waiting rooms overflow. Will the Minister tell us how the figure of £250,000 for medical audit announced in the White Paper was arrived at? Will it be reviewed in the light of representations that have been made about its inadequacy?

The Government's proposals take no account of the need to increase preventive medicine and ignore the costs of smoking, bad diet, alcohol abuse and poor housing. They do nothing for those most in need of help—those with disabilities or handicaps, the elderly, the frail, the deprived, the isolated and the homeless.

The Government's failure to respond to the Griffiths report and their proposals in "Promoting Better Health" and "Working for Patients" highlight Ministers' complete lack of understanding and ignorance about health, personal social services and the needs of the people who use, and want to continue to use, primary care and community care services.

The next decade will see greater demands placed on medical and community services from an increasingly elderly population and by diseases such as AIDS. This year could have been the year in which the Government met the challenge and laid out their plans for the future. Instead there is silence on community care and cuts in primary care.

While the Government play political games with our health care services, millions of people will remain trapped in their homes in poverty, deprivation, illness and hardship. The Government neither see them or care for them. It will be left to a future Government to release them, and I hope that that will be sooner rather than later.

7.40 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'expresses full support for the Government's policy of community care and for the proposals set out in the White Paper, Working for Patients: commends the Government's record on the funding and development of primary health care and community care; and believes that the White Paper, together with the Government's earlier White Paper, Promoting Better Health, will help family doctors to develop the services which they provide for their patients, strengthen the provision of primary care in general and complement the development of policies for community care, improve the quality of care for all patients, and ensure that all those concerned with delivering health care make the best use of resources available to them.'.

The debate, which I was glad to see on the Order Paper, should have provided the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), given his background in local government, with an opportunity to make a thoughtful speech about the problems of community care. I am sorry that he did not take the opportunity to do so, but instead resorted to a melange of lowest-common-denominator party politics. He seemed to be reading large chunks of a British Medical Association brief. I do not expect high standards from Opposition Members, but is a Social and Liberal Democratic party health policy to be written by the BMA and parroted by its spokesman in the House without recognition of the opinions of people who are concerned about a consumerist Health Service and want it to have consistency of standards? We did not have an especially distinguished performance from the Social Democratic party yesterday, but at least there was admission of concepts such as internal markets, which are necessary for a developing Health Service.

The hon. Member for Southport appeared to be nothing more than a mouthpiece for a trade union, which I always thought was the traditional role of the Labour party.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall give way in a moment.

I can at least say that I listened to all the speech of the hon. Member for Southport, which is more than can be said for the leader of the SLD, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). The right hon. Gentleman disappeared about two thirds of the way through his hon. Friend's speech. I do not know whether that was caused by the quality of the hon. Gentleman's speech, but no doubt we shall be told.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Cheap.

Mr. Mellor: Hon. Members who say that they represent a different sort of politics shout and jeer as though the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has been giving them lessons. It is perfectly legitimate to inquire—it is much more edifying than the words that tripped from the lips of the hon. Member for Southport—why the leader of the SLD felt compelled to leave halfway through his hon. Friend's speech.

Mr. Carlile *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall give way in a moment.

There were some interesting deficiencies in the remarks of the hon. Member for Southport on community care. He spoke of it as though it was exclusively the preserve of other people. It is interesting that, as we run up to county council elections, not a word or sentence was wasted on the community care policies of the various Liberal county councils. It may be that when it comes to putting these great ideas into practice there is not much about which those who have held office for the SLD can boast.

I shall enjoy showing how the hon. Member for Southport was wrong about cuts. It was interesting to hear his remarks about cuts in primary care, because expenditure on it has increased by 50 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Carlile: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) knows that I am halfway

through a point. If he contains himself a little longer I shall give way, but if he wants me to carry on and prevent other hon. Members speaking I shall happily do so because that is the only effect of sedentary observations. If he allows me to go on, I shall give way in my own good time and allow him to make a substantive speech.

If hon. Members want a sensible debate, they should start sensibly. I cannot allow talk of cuts in primary health care when expenditure on it has increased 50 per cent. in real terms over the past 10 years. The number of GPs has increased 20 per cent.; the number of dentists has increased by almost 20 per cent.; the number of GP support staff has increased by 50 per cent.; and the number of practice nurses has almost doubled.

Expenditure on community care has increased sharply in real terms. There is much room for sensible discussion on the issue, which fitfully appeared in the speech of the hon. Member for Southport. The Government are working hard to consider the implications of the Griffiths report. It is not a matter for sneering, second-rate, lowest-common-denominator politics. The quality of care that we should be offering an increasingly aging population and who is best placed to provide it are serious issues.

There were one or two refreshing aspects in the speech made by the hon. Member for Southport. He acknowledged that, in considering the proper provider market, we should not, as do the official Opposition, consider only local authorities. We must consider the role of health authorities and the private and voluntary sectors. Interestingly, in the Janus-faced way in which the SLD deal with these matters, the hon. Gentleman's remarks seemed to stimulate a lively debate among his right hon. and hon. Friends. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery appeared unable to agree about the quality of private nursing homes. The crucial factual background that provides the basis for sensible debate was again lacking.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) would have us believe that private nursing is all doom and gloom. When we took office in 1979, the amount of social security paid to elderly people in private residential nursing homes was £10 million. By one of those massive cuts inflicted on the nation by this Government, we expect the amount paid this year to be £1 billion. That not only shows the Government's contribution to the care of the elderly but raises some difficult questions about the proper gatekeeper role.

The hon. Member for Southport—I could not help feeling that a good speech was trying to get out—raised a matter about which we are all concerned: what we do in the community through integrated care services to prevent elderly people from going into long-term residential care. I do not often meet elderly people whose ambition is to go into long-term residential care; most of them wish to avoid it for as long as possible. It is sad that "it-says-here-BMA rhetoric", lowest-common-denominator politics and inaccurate party charges disfigured what could have been an interesting debate about an issue that will not go away and, sooner or later, will have to be considered in depth.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The Minister has rather let his bile run away with him. He accused my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) of parroting the views of the British Medical Association. Why has he felt reduced to writing to Conservative Back Benchers, asking them to ask members of the Conservative party throughout the country to write to their local media to parrot his views? Is it acceptable to parrot the views of the Minister, but not those of doctors who care for patients?

Mr. Mellor: I do not think that we should have a one-sided debate and I believe that there will come a time when people think about these matters a little more rationally. The cynical exploitation of patients by the BMA's tendentious leaflet will seem shocking to people other than the Government. Each of us must determine what role we play in these debates. It is sad and regrettable that hon. Gentlemen from the Social and Liberal Democratic party seem to think that their policy on primary health care can be devised for them by the BMA. I would have thought that they would want to stand up for the patients and not just articulate the opinions of doctors.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall not give way yet. Many of the doctors' opinions are based not on fact, but on tendentious assertions.

Mr. Clarke: May I gently remind the Minister that this debate is about community care? So that we are not unfair to him at a later stage, I ask him firmly to use this opportunity to give us the Government's views on the Griffiths report.

Mr. Mellor: I will not use this opportunity to give the Government's view on the Griffiths report. If the hon. Gentleman penetrates further into the motion, he will see that it deals with primary care as well as community care. The hon. Member for Southport said specifically that he was now turning to primary care, and I did him the service of turning to primary care a little earlier in my speech than he did in his.

I shall now turn to community care. The Griffiths report raises interesting issues. It raises the issue of how we deliver community care to an increasingly significant number of people requiring it. It requires difficult decisions to be made about the manner in which the provision is delivered, by whom it is delivered and whether distinctions are made between those who provide the services and those who provide the resources, as well as the framework in which the service is resourced and the quality tests that are put in place. To those of us who have to consider such matters seriously for implementation, they are difficult matters. For those outside, it can become merely a party game. Until the Government announce their decision, people ask where the decision is and jibe about why it has not come forward. The moment the decision comes forward, people shout the odds about what a terrible decision it is and ask why such a rushed hotch-potch has been inflicted on the public.

Mr. Maclennan *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall give way in a minute. I am giving way too often and I do not want to be long.

We intend to bring forward our response to the Griffiths report as soon as the various Ministers have considered it. The hon. Member for Southport was at least accurate in saying that a committee was considering the response. We want to bring forward our response to the report as soon as our deliberations are complete.

I find it disappointing that the hon. Member for Southport, who was an experienced local councillor, could

[Mr. Mellor]

fall so readily for the idea that everything is suffering some sort of blight while awaiting the Griffiths report. Local authorities do not generally wait for the Government to make the decision. They generally—and rightly—assert that they have the powers to carry on doing the job. As we make clear, there is plenty of scope for the further development of community care. The more some local authorities project good community care, the more they can make us forget some of the glaring examples of the inner-London boroughs, which bring the idea of local authority social service departments into disrepute.

The hon. Member for Southport said that there were no resources. He could not be wider of the mark. Between the financial year 1980-81 and the financial year 1988-89, expenditure on personal social services increased by 25 per cent. in real terms. Local authorities propose to spend £3·3 billion in 1988-89 on personal social services. We hear some feeble excuses for inaction, but £3·3 billion is a formidable sum if properly deployed.

It is interesting that, although the hon. Member for Southport spoke for almost half an hour, there was not a word of commendation for any step in community care taken by councils controlled by the Liberals, SLD or whatever we are meant to call them. That silence speaks volumes for the record of achievement that the voters will have the opportunity to consider. I give way to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I am grateful to the Minister. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House what specific criticisms he is implying against Liberal-controlled or Liberal-led councils?

Mr. Mellor: I was simply pointing out that if it was as easy to transform the situation as is suggested—*[Interruption.]* The hon. and learned Gentleman should not bandy charges around without carefully considering the opening speech. I can respond only to the debate to which I have been invited to reply. I would sooner have replied to a more substantial debate than the one on which we seem to have embarked.

Mr. Maclennan: The Minister is trying to treat the points made by my hon. Friends as peculiar party points, yet in the space of 15 minutes, he has not given us any idea of the Government's policy in this area. If we draw attention to the vacuity of the Government's case after 10 years of office and the formidable criticisms made of it by the doctors, we are not alone. The Minister should, at least in this debate, answer the trenchant criticisms of the *Financial Times* which, last week, devoted its second leader to drawing attention to the fact that the Government had nothing to say on community care.

Mr. Mellor: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has recovered his vigour after his difficult period of leadership. I have already made it clear that in relation to community care, which is primarily a local authority responsibility, the increase in resourcing has been formidable. From the centre, a host of initiatives have been taken by the Government to improve quality and training. We have now embarked on a thorough look at the manner in which community care is delivered, which the Griffiths report stimulated and on which the Government will give their opinion in due course. It is a sign of the significance of this issue that the Government are taking time for consideration. The Opposition are trying to have it both ways. They criticise the fact that no decision has been reached, just as they will criticise the decision, whatever it is, when it is reached.

I shall now deal with the area in which we have direct responsibility for primary care through the National Health Service. These have been years of conspicuous achievement, and I gave the hon. Member for Southport the figures. Never has there been greater expansion in primary care than under this Government. Never has more been achieved in broadening the base of the NHS and extending out into a range of necessary preventive services than in the 1980s. That was impossible in the years in which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) held ministerial office because of the slashing cuts that were made then in NHS provision, as is well known.

When we look at community care, we see a great increase in services throughout, which has been made possible by the increased economic strength of this country. Expenditure on health services for elderly people rose between 1980 and 1987 by 29 per cent., although the growth in the elderly population over that period was only 6·7 per cent. The number of elderly people treated by district nurses increased by 14 per cent., the number of meals on wheels by 11 per cent., the number of day centre places by 16 per cent. and the number of home helps by 28 per cent. This has been a time of growth. We now need to consider the manner in which those services are delivered, their efficiency and quality. I do not resent listening to the contributions of others on this important topic. We shall be glad if, having got rid of all the necessary party politics, we can settle down to have a debate that assists with the difficult issues of coming to terms with the Griffiths future.

It is clear that those who have been innovative in community care, as have several local authorities, can continue with that. We believe that the future of community care lies with the creation of, in effect, a level playing field which would allow all the various agencies to play their part and which would allow the voluntary and private sectors to play an increasing role.

All those decisions will soon be heard by the House when the Government announce their response to the Griffiths report——

Mr. Thurnham: My hon. and learned Friend has mentioned increased provision in the public sector. Does he agree that one difference between the Conservative and Labour parties is the much greater value that we place on the contribution made by voluntary groups? Is he aware of the excellent work done by the Crossroads care attendance scheme in over 130 areas? Will he provide Crossroads with support in other areas, including Bolton?

Mr. Mellor: What my hon. Friend has said about the voluntary sector is entirely right. As he well knows, we have made considerable use of our ability to grant-aid voluntary organisations, both larger ones with a traditional role such as the Red Cross, and smaller ones, such as Crossroads, that have recently come on the scene. It is clear that we now have a much more comprehensive approach to community care than was possible before. We can look forward to shaping with some confidence the framework within which that can be set in the future.

I trust that the House will have no difficulty in rejecting the motion and I urge it, in due course, to vote for the Government amendment.

8 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and his colleagues on choosing the vital subject of community care for this debate. I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his comprehensive and informed speech, which clearly was not matched by the Minister's response.

If the Minister's comments are the extent of the Government's thinking on the Griffiths report and on community care, the rumours that we have been hearing about a statement being made fairly soon do not appear to be well based. The Minister gave the impression that he had hardly read the Griffiths report. He certainly gave the impression that he does not understand the immense problems of community care.

When the Minister says that the Opposition criticise the Government for not responding to Griffiths, he is right; and when he says again that we may criticise the Government for their response when it comes, he is right again, because we have that right. What we cannot accept is that the Government will do nothing, if only because Sir Roy Griffiths himself said that to do nothing is simply not an option. Indeed, why should we do nothing?

The Government appear to take the view that when, after his intensive examination of the problems, Sir Roy suggested that there was a lead role for local government, he was inviting the Government to produce their prejudices because they do not accept that local government should have a major role. The Government ignore the problems that have been identified and which invite an immediate response.

We are led to believe that in this area, as in others, we should depend on market forces. Indeed, the Minister used the phrase, "the internal market". However, if market forces had been so productive and so appealing, there would not be 30,000 former psychiatric patients on the streets of New York, which has exactly that system, with all their problems unresolved.

The Minister and some of his hon. Friends who intervened referred to resources. I stress that we are entitled to complain bitterly about the unplanned growth in private residential homes, which has been unrelated to any real assessment. It is not as though we said, as a society, on the basis of consultation, that that was the best thing to do. It is not as though Lady Wagner, whose report has also been ignored, suggested that that was the best thing to do; we have drifted towards it. No responsible Government can invest that amount of resources in private accommodation unchecked—the accommodation is not in any sense adequately inspected—and nobody should pretend that that this is the way towards making a major contribution to community care in the 1980s, and as we approach the 1990s.

Strangely, the Minister devoted most of his speech almost exclusively to the subject of primary care. I say "strangely" because all the evidence suggests that the Government's proposals for the National Health Service in their review will add to the problems rather than taking away from them. I am sorry that the Scottish Office is not represented on the Government Front Bench, but I make the point that our experience of the response of general practitioners to the review is typical of the United Kingdom as a whole. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) is hoping to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to raise this point.

Although the Minister was switched from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to his present role because some people perceived that he had an ability to communicate, he might have to do his job a little better when he has examined a letter that was sent to the Secretary of State for Scotland by the Ayrshire and Arran local medical committee, which states:

> "The general practitioners of Ayrshire and Arran held a meeting last night, Monday 17 April 1989.
>
> 115 doctors attended and 115 voted against the new contract which was circulated last week."

That letter can hardly be taken as a sign that we should have any confidence in the Government's proposals for the Health Service, especially when we consider their bankrupt approach to community care.

The hon. Member for Southport was generous enough to refer to the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. That Act gained its Royal Assent in July 1986 and has been mentioned in almost all of our debates on this subject. We always plead for its implementation, as do the voluntary and professional bodies that have briefed hon. Members in preparation for the debate. Indeed, they are entitled to do so, because many people recognise that section 7, which, as yet, has not been implemented, contains many of the concepts of Sir Roy Griffiths's approach to the dreadful problem of people being discharged from hospital into community care that does not exist. We want to see the Act implemented.

We find it incredible that the Government's circular, issued in February this year, entitled "Discharge of Patients from Hospital"—the Department of Health has also published a document entitled "Discharge of Patients from Hospital"—states:

> "Social Services Departments will expect Health Authorities to liaise with them about the wide range of duties, including those under . . . the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, which fall to social services and to follow the arrangements which apply locally for carrying them out."

Given that the Government are already advertising that Act, as MENCAP has pointed out, it is not unreasonable that we should ask them to provide the resources to implement it and to produce a plain person's guide for individuals and for organisations such as the Schizophrenia Fellowship which, like the rest of us, wants to see a strategy for hospital discharge and assessment of long-stay patients before they leave hospital and enter the community so that their needs will be met.

I am sure, too, that the Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped would urge on the Government the need, in Scotland, for the kind of joint planning arrangements that have existed for many years in England and Wales, and which we persuaded a reluctant Government to include in the National Health Service (Amendment) Act 1986, shortly after the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act was passed.

All this represents cost-effectiveness in terms of crisis avoidance. The Minister did not address himself to that, though it is a worry for hundreds of thousands of patients and their families, carers and communities. The revolving

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

door syndrome, to which organisations such as MIND have constantly referred, is, of course, unacceptable. We hear, too, that the Salvation Army estimates that up to three quarters of its hostels' male inmates may be suffering from mental illnesses. We know also that many mentally handicapped and mentally ill persons find themselves in prison simply because the courts have nowhere else to send them.

Last Thursday I raised the question with the Home Secretary, and, in reply, he said that he was consulting the Secretary of State for Health. I had expected, and it would have been reasonable for the hon. Member for Southport to expect, the Government to tell us precisely what they are doing to reduce this scandal. What we are seeing, in the name of so-called community care, is a hospital rundown and a pace of community care provision that simply do not match. Closing hospitals or hospital wards, and throwing people into the community—in many cases, on to the streets—into hostels, and so on, is not community care in any meaningful sense. We know that for every psychiatric nurse working in the community there are about 25 working in hospitals. So there is a curious emphasis on the reverse. There is a need to recognise the problems where they exist within the community, not necessarily within hospitals exclusively.

The Minister failed to mention—although, in fairness, I have to say that the hon. Member for Southport did mention—the very vexed problem of the immense weight upon carers in this community—people who are saving the Treasury millions of pounds every year. In fairness, I must also point out that, curiously, these people are omitted from Sir Roy Griffiths' report. In terms of these problems, we as a House must recognise the tremendous worth of carers in every part of the United Kingdom. In many cases those people are doing a supportive job that ought to be seen as the role of Parliament itself.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), who would have very much liked to be here for the debate, is very keen that we should urge on the Minister the need for a coherent approach to benefits for disabled people. We are told that the Government are considering these matters, and we are entitled to ask when we can expect a response. Our concern is about poverty, homelessness and neglect. The Spastics Society issued a document—to most hon. Members, I think—in preparation for this debate. It introduced us to very interesting case studies.

A document that is to be published soon refers, for example, to the case of June Morris. I know that we shall never forget that our debates and discussions about these matters are about people, about individuals, about the need for a collective response from society. The document says:

"June Morris is 34 and has lived in a local authority-owned bungalow for three and a half years, having moved there from her parents' home.

She has to wait for a home help to come each week, who stays for an hour. She's waiting to hear whether a laundry service could be made available. Having asked for an emergency phone she's awaiting the outcome. The combination of cerebral palsy and arthritis now warrants the use of a wheelchair. However, the kitchen and bathroom are not suitably adapted. The kitchen was looked at in January and again in August, but still nothing has been done . . .

June doesn't believe community care exists—'There isn't any. It should mean that there is someone to turn to when you need help. I had no social worker for a year.'"

There is not one hon. Member who could not relate similar cases, similar circumstances, all of them unacceptable in this society.

Of course we want to see more respite care; of course we want to see more assessments; of course we want to see more crisis avoidance in the carers' situation. But we cannot have these things unless there is proper resourcing, as well as proper recognition of services that have to be provided. The Association of Directors of Social Services has complained—rightly, I think—about the problems of training. It has reminded us of the vacancies in social work in London boroughs—15 per cent., with a turnover of 28 per cent. Happily, the situation is improving, but we have to do far more to recognise that these problems exist and to make sure that there is proper provision.

The Government are particularly mean-minded—especially in view of the dreadful problems of child abuse and the information that is now available to us—about the recommendation of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work on the need for an extra year's training. I hope that, on reflection, the Government will give serious thought to that recommendation, which, in the meantime, has been set aside.

Consumers ought to have a say in these matters. I believe that, were they to give us their views—for example, on housing investment—they would demonstrate that they consider our present commitment to be inadequate. Indeed, as consumers they would, in many cases, relate homelessness to drug or alcohol abuse or related problems. I believe, too, that they would join the Opposition in regretting bitterly the inadequacy of arranging for older children leaving care to go into the community. The Government's social security changes help these matters not one whit. If the Minister of State speaks for the Government when the Children Bill comes before the House, he will have an opportunity to correct what amounts to a scandal, and I hope that he will take that opportunity.

The community charge—the poll tax—is, of course, a perverse incentive in terms of our objectives. Even if they qualify for a rebate, many people in my constituency have to find £60 to £80 annually out of their very meagre pocket money. I do not regard that as being helpful to our objectives.

I want to ask the Minister to consider the many representations that have been made to the Government about land sales. Is money going back to the mental health services? There is very little evidence that it is. Some of the conditions that have been identified are absolutely unacceptable. The recent health advisory service reports on our psychiatric hospitals refer to gross overcrowding and to dirty, shabby, badly repaired, unsuitable, drab, depressing hospitals smelling of urine. The list continues. In many cases the hospitals are dilapidated, and institutional life means that there is no opportunity for people to live in dignity.

Despite the Minister's somewhat weak defence, the Audit Commission, even prior to Griffiths—and Griffiths accepted its view—described community care as being "in disarray". That is entirely unacceptable, but how could it be otherwise when, we are told, the Department of Health is responsible for promoting care in the community, the

Department of the Environment rate-caps local authorities that increase their expenditure on community care, and the Department of Social Security guides people towards a form of semi-institutional care in residential homes and, at the same time, administers the new Social Security Act, which has resulted in substantial loss of benefit for many former patients?

These matters are tremendously important, and there is a growing public awareness of them. The evidence suggests that most community care is provided by a member of a family, a whole family, or close friends. Community care should not be considered a marginal policy to be dismissed as being for a marginal group. It should involve mutuality —the responsibility of people to each other, which creates the fabric of a society of which it is worth being part. Whatever other disagreements we may have with Sir Roy Griffiths—there are many—he was right to say that the status quo is simply not an option.

8.20 pm

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I agree with the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) that this is an important subject. I was glad when, at the end of his speech, he talked about the responsibility of all of us for each other. I did not agree with his remark to the effect that carers were doing Parliament's job. It is a great error to examine such matters in terms of statutory provision. It is Parliament's job to pass statutes. However, the hon. Gentleman redeemed himself in his closing remarks. It is important to remember that the statutory services and voluntary services should never take more than part of the responsibility. The major part must still lie with all of us —ordinary people—to care for our own families, relatives and friends.

The Government's amendment asks hon. Members to express full support for the Government's policy on community care. I have in mind an amendment to the amendment. I will vote for the Government to express full support for their record, which is quite good, as my hon. and learned Friend the Minister demonstrated. I cannot say that I fully support the Government's policy, because I do not know what it is. It is in a state of limbo. The reason for the debate is that hon. Members are anxiously awaiting the Government's policy. It will be even easier to support it when we know what it is.

It is understandable that the Government have had to take some time over the matter. It is obviously complicated. At the same time, we cannot deny or duck the fact that we face serious problems arising from delay. I beg my hon. and learned Friend to end the delay as rapidly as possible. Delay is affecting morale and recruitment.

My county of Buckinghamshire has a good record in the way in which it is trying to tackle community care. It has been keen to progress and it has been doing some good work. I have seen good local authority/county council provision of residential homes of one sort or another for people who come out of long-stay hospitals. A few days ago, I saw an excellent provision which had been set up by the health authority, working in conjunction with the Shaftesbury Society, providing a mixture of residential care and day care for the handicapped. We are doing good things in our county.

However, there is a blockage at present. That has quite a bit to do with difficulties in spending the necessary capital if the crucial transfer of individuals from long-term hospitals to other forms of residential care is effectively to take place. We must have decisions. About 95 people in a hospital for the mentally handicapped in my constituency have been identified as suitable for moving out of the hospital into some other form of care. At the moment, nothing can be done because the resources are not available; they must be unlocked. It was put to me that we need some kind of bridging loan to enable the transfer from the hospital institutional care to the appropriate alternative form of residential care. I hope that the Government will rapidly face that issue.

I am not sure whether we have corrected the anomalies that have existed because of the different sources of funding. I understand why we have had such sources— income support, Health Service funding, and so on. The Government have recently been trying to produce a more rational and coherent pattern, but it is important to make sure that we have a better system for dovetailing different sources of funding. I can only repeat a point which was made earlier: areas such as mine with high housing costs have particular difficulties in the provision of residential care when the scales are set on a national basis.

To be honest, my hon. and learned Friend's speech lacked an assessment of the present situation. We all accept the principle of moving people out of big mental hospitals when appropriate. We know that the Government have been genuinely trying to back that policy. However, we need to know what is happening. How many people have come out of such hospitals? How much additional care is being provided for those who still need residential care? The matter is complicated. We are not arguing that everbody should go from a hospital into another form of residential care, but some people need to do so. Happily, others can go back to their own homes, and that is the ideal solution. The public are entitled to more information.

It is equally important not to be dogmatic. In its good report, the Audit Commission said that community care is

"not about imposing a community solution as the only option, in the way that institutional care has been the only option for many people in the past."

We still need some long-stay hospital provisions. We certainly need a good deal of residential provision. We also need the truest form of community care—more support for people who are able to live at home. The crucial point —hon. Members have been a little chary of facing up to it —is the problem of where we should allocate responsiblity for seeing that things actually happen. The Government are finding that point difficult to resolve. There are good arguments for the different points of view. Griffiths was justified to refer to

"a feeling that community care is a poor relation; everybody's distant relative but nobody's baby."

The job is to assign the baby.

We must accept that co-operation, good will, and even adequate resources are not enough. They are all necessary, but we must define who is responsible for looking after the people about whom we are talking. Whatever scheme we adopt must bring together or allow to operate effectively the medical, personal and social services side and the cash or social security side. That is a truism. Griffiths was right to state that the crucial need was to pick out one point of reference to make sure that each individual has what he or she needs. That means at the ground floor level—at the level of the community carer, the care manager, or

[Mr. Timothy Raison]

whatever we like to call him or her. That is necessary. There must be a responsible organisation to whom that carer may report and for whom he or she would work.

Griffiths was right to say that local authority personal social services departments are best equipped to do the job. Of course the health aspect is important. Nobody—certainly not Griffiths—says that there is not an important health job. Nobody is saying that the social services can do the whole health job. They cannot. Clearly, GPs and community nurses will still be important in future for discovering needs. Social services departments are best placed to do the all-round job of finding out and then making sure that needs are dealt with by a suitable body.

I should have thought that that is in line with the enabling role which the Government nowadays regard as appropriate to local government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment wrote a pamphlet about that enabling role. Even if there are doubts about piling more and more on to local authorities, it is appropriate that local government should have a co-ordinating role or the job of allocating accountability.

The Royal College of Nursing has argued that we should have a newly designed service, brought about by merging district health authorities, family practitioner committees and the personal social services, all of which, in the view of the college, should be funded by the health side. That is worth considering. No doubt the Government have done so, but I am a little chary of setting up a big new organisation of that kind.

The same doubt would apply to the proposals put forward by the Association of Directors of Social Services, which wants a national community care development agency. If we want to get on with the job, rather than devising grandiose mechanisms, it would be better to keep the social services departments that are in being. They might need more backing and resources to carry out the role, but I would prefer that instinctively to a new mechanism.

Griffiths also talked about the need for a Minister of State with responsibility for community care. One has to recognise that under our constitution Ministers of State cannot have ultimate responsibility; that has to lie with the Secretary of State. However, there is a great deal to be said for a Minister of State working under the Secretary of State to provide a focus. If I may draw an analogy from my experience, I was Minister for Overseas Development; I was not Minister of Overseas Development. I think that few people recognise the distinction. The Foreign Secretary is by statute Minister of Overseas Development. I was Minister for Overseas Development under him and I had to get on with the job. That parallel is perhaps reasonable, although the ultimate responsibility has to lie with the Secretary of State, who is the crucial person when it comes to the scramble for funds in the public expenditure round.

We have had to wait too long. It is urgent to have a decision. I know that the Government are thinking hard about the matter and I understand their difficulties. Unless there are compelling reasons, Griffiths provides the best formula. I look forward to hearing soon from the Front Bench what the Government propose.

8.31 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) who has given us the opportunity to debate what many people regard as an important issue. I was disappointed at the lacklustre and somewhat arrogant approach of the Minister.

I support strongly the comments of the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison). If it were up to me, which of course it is not, he would be moved to the Front Bench and I would dispatch the present incumbent back to the Foreign Office where he was doing an excellent job. His attitude towards the Palestinians was much more understandable and correct.

It is not a mistake that the White Paper, which is euphemistically called "Working for Patients", omits any reference to community care and care for the elderly. That does not mean that the Government are not aware of the inadequacies and the disorganisation of community care. I think that they are fully aware of the position. That is why the then Secretary of State for Health, who is now Secretary of State for Employment, appointed Sir Roy Griffiths to make recommendations on care in the community. Most people would agree that the impetus for the report was not concern for the elderly but, rather, concern about money.

There were serious criticisms of the Government's community care policy by the Audit Commission, which was alarmed that much of the £6 billion spent annually on the mentally handicapped was being wasted and was not being spent properly. Sir Roy Griffiths was not appointed to create a model for adequate community care with no cost spared; indeed, quite the reverse was the case. His remit was

"To improve the use of funds as a contribution to more effective community care."

Hon. Members should note that no further resources were brought into the equation. We should underline that.

The Griffiths report was published in the spring of 1988, yet still there is no response to its recommendations other than the answer that we get on every occasion when we raise the question—that the Government are looking at the matter. We have had nothing apart from vague representations from the Minister that something is likely to happen in the near future. That is all we have been told.

Why have the Government remained silent for so long on a report which was excellently prepared, although there is much in it with which I disagree? The suggestions in the report worry the Government. The right hon. Member for Aylesbury outlined some of them. The hardest nut to crack and the worst thing for the Government to swallow is the suggestion by Sir Roy Griffiths and his team that they should give local authorities a leading role as providers of care, assessors and co-ordinators. The Minister indicated clearly that he has no faith in any local authority carrying out those duties.

There has been reference in the debate to the suggestion in the report for a Minister of State for community care, with appropriate departmental support. That proposal is not popular with the Government. If such a post were established, people who are hungry for the financial aid needed to carry out their programmes would have someone to target for funds, and the Government would be seen as attempting to put all those pleas to one side. It is not surprising that the Government are not enamoured

of the report. That is supposition on my part, because to date they have not said whether they are enamoured or otherwise. While they are considering the report, hundreds of thousands of people in a very distressed state, out on the streets and elsewhere, need the care that we want to see established.

I disagree fundamentally with some of the Griffiths recommendations. For instance, young unemployed people should not be press-ganged through the youth training scheme or any other scheme into home-help-type jobs, as suggested by Griffiths, simply as a means of getting community care on the cheap. That is not the way that we should go about it.

Neither do I wish to see a two-tier system for the elderly, with tax incentives to encourage private health care, as suggested in the report. My party and the people whom I represent do not think that residential care should be means-tested. We do not want to return to a system with deserving and non-deserving poor. All the people should be treated equally and their needs should be met. There should be greater choice and greater independence for all who require care in the community. That can happen only if the right amount of cash is injected and if it is directed at the right targets. The aim of moving more care into the community and away from residential institutions is laudable, but only where real support and care are available. An aim set for Sir Roy was to reverse the financial incentives operating in favour of residential care.

Residential care is the biggest growth industry in Ayrshire, where there are nearly 10 times as many homes as there were four years ago. There has been an incredible increase in the number of homes. I have visited many of them, and have talked to the people who manage them. The vast majority are run very well. I have no objections to the way in which they are run. The people who live in them are happy, but many of them would be happier if they had been allowed to remain in their own homes, which they cannot do.

The Government must recognise that there must be proper finance available for looking after elderly relatives at home. The carer's benefit should be paid for looking after that person and should not be included as income when establishing a person's level of income support. After all, when one considers how small that benefit is, when compared with the cost of keeping a person in a residential home, there is no reason why the Government should not make that a benefit which is unrelated to income.

The Griffiths report may not be completely to everyone's liking, but it is important because it provides a basis for developing the policies for care in the community which are long overdue. They should have been in place before we witnessed the large-scale closures of hospitals and large-scale openings of residential and nursing homes. We are trying to close the door after the horse has bolted.

I urge the Government to make their responses to the Griffiths report known as quickly as possible, or at least to initiate a whole day's debate on community care for the elderly, the mentally handicapped and all those whom we genuinely wish to assist. I shall cite one case that will clarify my misgivings about the Government's intentions for community care and, for instance, the community care grant.

Yesterday it was reported that more than 40 per cent. of the money made available for community care grants in the Scottish districts is being returned because the money has not been taken up. That is not because people are not trying to get the money, but because the guidelines are so tightly defined—there is no discretion at local level—and the money has not been properly used.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), raised with the Minister the case of his constituent who was in a mental hospital for 10 years and was being released into the community. The district council gave the woman a house and an application was made for a community grant of £500 to assist. She was refused that grant because her income was 4p over income support due to her invalidity benefit. That woman really could have benefited from being allowed to live in the community and having a proper start in a new life. However, because of the barriers presented by that extra 4p, she was refused a grant. She may end up back in hospital because she will be unable to cope. There should not be such a rigid attitude towards people who are trying desperately to come back into the community. We should not have such tight legislation which stops a person taking his or her rightful place in the community and being given back much of the dignity that he or she has lost.

8.42 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (Norfolk, South-West): I am pleased to contribute to the debate. While the NHS review and the new GPs' contract may have been the focus of much professional attention during the last couple of months, a more consistent interest has been expressed over a number of years about the current and future structure of care in the community.

That interest is entirely predictable, given, first, the demographic changes at each end of the spectrum, which eventually will mean that there are fewer people to look after more people; secondly, rising public expectation; and, thirdly, changing family patterns, with implications for carers and the public services. I mean by that the breakdown of marriages. While it might be fairly expected by many that they would look after one mother-in-law, looking after two or three, if they enter into a second or third marriage, might be stretching it a bit. That is a flippant way of saying that obvious lines of responsibility within changing family patterns may be weakened. I believe that we must consider that.

We must also accept that there is a growing involvement of the private and voluntary sector. It has already been said that expenditure in the private and voluntary sector is now approaching £1 billion, which is a considerable sum. It was most unfortunate that the Opposition made a quite unwarranted slur on the motives of people who run the private and residential homes, which I believe will not go unnoticed by them.

The Audit Commission argued that community care is about

> "changing the balance of services and finding the most suitable placement for people from a wide variety of options. It is not about imposing a community solution as the only option in the way that institutional care has been the only option for many people in the past."

It is important to stress that definition of community care, which makes it an option within a spectrum. While Governments may always have regarded it as such, until the last two or three years it has been regarded in health and social services circles as a policy leading inexorably away from institutional care of any kind.

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

Clearly, community care should provide a range of care services through which people may move, both in and out, and including as one of its parts in-patient care, whether short-term, respite or crisis care.

As services are at present organised, community care requires very close and effective co-operation between a number of agencies—health authorities, local authorities, housing agencies, social services, social security, the voluntary and private sectors and, of course, relatives and carers. To quote the Audit Commission again, it must "cover prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, health maintenance and social supportive networks."

The necessary co-operation between a range of agencies with different power bases, and such a complex range of care to provide, sets a task whose complexity is awesome, although, of course, many achieve it. Indeed, if Governments had set about making community care provision as difficult, as time-wasting, as bureaucratic and as committee-bound as they could, they could hardly have done worse than the present system against which providers have to battle. Especially with reference to joint financing, I was most interested to note the simple pride with which the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) announced yesterday that he had devised the system.

Within that complicated structure, the Government's achievements have been good. For example, the need for mentally handicapped children to live in long-stay hospitals has been virtually eliminated. The adult hospital resident population of mentally handicapped people has been reduced by more than one third. It is difficult to assess the Government's record by public spending measures, precisely because the responsibility for funding is spread between a number of agencies. However, I believe that we can all accept the evidence of the National Audit Office, which found a significant increase in spending on the elderly, the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped between 1977 and 1985. None of us should forget that the debate is taking place within the context of a record spending on the National Health Service of £26 billion and a social services budget of £3·3 billion. We are not talking about a service which is being starved of funds.

Since 1979, much more money has been put into joint finance. That has increased by about 60 per cent. and, more significantly, its take-up has increased from 52 per cent. to nearly 99 per cent. That has been encouraged by interesting new conditions, such as the dowry system, which unblocked Health Service funds for use in the community by the simple expedient of transferring the funds with the patient into the community.

There are some excellent examples of good and innovative work, which demonstrate that quite highly dependent people can be cared for in the community. That is the message emerging from 28 pilot schemes set up by the Department of Health and Social Security in 1983, which were funded by an additional joint funding budget. I mention in particular the Kent community care scheme for frail elderly people, which links devolved budgetary management with the design of individual care packages. In my county, which is Conservative-controlled, we have excellent schemes. For instance, the Lawns in Great Yarmouth, which was formerly a residential home for the elderly run by social services, now provides an interesting, acceptable and popular range of care and help for elderly people. In the Norwich health district we have community care groups with proper appraisal, and West Norfolk and Wisbech health authorities have well-developed day care and drop-in centres linked to private residential care.

The picture of the last 10 years of community care under the Government shows steady progress, although it has been a little unevenly distributed. We have seen increased spending and some solid evaluation of what does and does not work. That is important. The Government face a daunting task in framing their response to Griffiths. Whatever structure is devised, the problems that I have mentioned will remain. There is the complexity of the mechanisms which involve many agencies and at least three Departments of State. There has been steadily increasing expenditure on the private and residential sectors, mainly for the elderly, which many of us welcome, and in which standards of care are monitored, thanks to the statutory agencies. However, it must be accepted that criteria for admission, and therefore for financial support, are not monitored. This is becoming a bottomless purse.

The Government also need to consider a number of models for the provision of community care. Some hon. Members have mentioned the local authority model. There are elements that can be commended to Ministers in the response to Griffiths by the Association of Directors of Social Services. The response mentions a mixed economy for care and service provision, a good national framework for regulation of monitoring, which everybody welcomes, and strengthened local accountability by care managers.

There is also the health authority model, in which existing community health services might be grouped together and subsume local authority services that are being nationally funded. There is the possible client group model, where we might transfer responsibility for the mentally handicapped to social services and responsibility for the mentally ill and some elderly people to the health authorities. Then, of course, there is the model of an entirely new agency which might plan and buy in care from local authorities, health authorities, voluntary organisations and the private sector.

In preparing their response to Griffiths the Government will want to consider the not inconsiderable amount of change planned for the National Health Service, especially in primary care. It might be difficult at present to give the National Health Service something else to worry about, although many of the worries expressed in yesterday's debate are entirely unfounded. I do not wish to see any more delay in the Government's response to the Griffiths report because some planning decisions are being held up pending that response. Given the complexity of the task and its importance to patients, which can only increase, I hope that the Government will take the time that they need to produce the right and most effective response, because I suspect that the ramifications will be with us long after the White Paper has been absorbed into professional practice.

8.52 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I propose to speak about general practitioner services, but before I turn to the merits of the case I should like to speak about the way in which the Minister of State, Department of Health approached the question of how general practitioner services should be run in future. I think he knows that I have a considerable regard for his political and forensic

and especially his legislative abilities. However, in his approach to general practitioners he has given the impression of coating himself with testy arrogance as a biscuit with bitter chocolate. That has caused great offence, not only to general practitioners but also to members of the public interested in the National Health Service.

It seems that the Minister is not too keen on listening to reasonable argument in the debate, but I know that he is always prepared to listen to opera. I shall draw a brief operatic analogy. General practitioners look upon the Government's blandishments in relation to general medical services rather like Bluebeard's bride at the entrance to his castle. I do not allege that the Minister is Bluebeard—that is his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. The Minister is merely the doorkeeper. General practitioners believe—in my view, rightly—that every time they, like Bluebead's bride, pick up one of the gilded offerings inside the castle, they find beneath it the curse that the Government are bringing upon the National Health Service.

I remember the bad old days of general practice. I am the son of a general practitioner who practised in an industrial Lancashire town. He is retired now and is a very old gentleman, but he had experience in private medicine, albeit not in this country, experience in hospitals and many years' experience in general practice. At one time he, like many other GPs, was single-handedly stemming the tide rather like King Canute. All over the town where we lived one could see queues of sometimes 30 or 40 patients outside each poorly maintained surgery, especially on Monday mornings. My father was a single-handed practitioner and on his half day off we had to escape from the house in which he had his surgery. He had to arrange that half day with another doctor, and if we stayed at home he would have no rest. As a result of the pressure he faced, I was sent by him to a good school with a foundation that provided for the sons of dead general practitioners to be educated for nothing. Many people were educated by way of the medical foundation in Epsom college.

In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, times changed, very much for the better. Nowadays, in most if not all parts of this country, we have group practices with much better facilities and offering a good service to patients. That happened in my father's practice. Those group practices are also able to contribute to the community. For example, the Department of Social Security depends upon general practitioners for its medical boards. How many GPs will still be able to do that work after they are compelled to work 20 hours a week in their surgeries?

Since childhood, and especially since I became a Member of the House, I have had an opportunity to observe a rather different sort of general practice, the rural medical practice. In preparing the new GP contract and in planning whatever strategy they have for general medical services in England and Wales—interestingly, there is a difference in Scotland—the Government have chosen to ignore almost completely the special needs of rural areas and rural medical practice.

Rural practices in my constituency, in other parts of rural Wales and probably elsewhere in the United Kingdom are, on the whole, well organised and provide a high standard of service. If a patient has an accident in my constituency the chances are that he is 30 miles from the nearest major casualty hospital. He goes either to his GP or to one of the little local hospitals where the GP carries out the casualty work and performs small operations and stitches up people. If he lives in a rural area such as mine, the chances are that he will be able to go to a branch surgery not in a far distant town but in a nearby village. The chances are that when he telephones the doctor's surgery and asks for an appointment and outlines any difficulties in getting to the surgery the doctor, assessing the needs of the patient, will take the entirely reasonable decision that the patient should not come to the surgery but that the doctor should visit the patient.

That is the special nature of rural medical services as they have developed and, on the whole, they are good, very good. I pay tribute where it is due to the Government for allowing those services to develop in a way that is beneficial to the community. But I ask the Minister why the Government have now decided to pull the rug from under good rural practitioner services. I shall refer to some specific matters which are evidence that the Government want to do just that.

As a direct result of the changes proposed to the GP contract, there is absolutely no doubt that doctors will be unable to visit their patients as often as they have in the past. A very good general practitioner whom I know well told me recently—and this was confirmed by other doctors at the meeting—that sometimes in a morning he can visit only three or four patients because of the distances involved. My recollection of my childhood in a busy town is that my father used sometimes to visit six or seven patients in one street. It is quite different in rural areas. If rural doctors are forced to spend 20 hours in their surgeries, they will spend some of that time twiddling their thumbs, looking for something to do, when they could be out visiting their patients. That cannot be in the public interest.

What is more, our community hospitals in places such as Welshpool, Llanidloes, Machynlleth and Newtown depend upon the GPs not sitting in their surgeries but going to the hospital to carry out the hospital services. This they will be unable to do if they are forced to sit in their surgeries for as long as 20 hours a week.

The Government have set targets for vaccination and cervical smear rates. In order even to maintain their income—the doctors in Montgomeryshire are not suggesting that their incomes are too low and should be substantially increased—doctors are to meet certain targets if the new contract comes into being. But these targets are wholly unrealistic in rural areas. The 90 per cent. vaccination target is impossible to achieve. Whooping cough vaccination, included as it is in the compulsory criteria for payments, will set ethical dilemmas which will affect all doctors, for not all are as convinced as perhaps the Minister is about the value of that vaccination.

One of my local practices campaigned especially hard on the need for cervical smears by writing and speaking to patients when they come into the surgery; but it still fell short of the target of 80 per cent. which the Government seek to set for cervical smears. Because it is unrealistic to try to reach those targets in rural areas, some doctors will decide that the targets will never be achieved, that as a result they will not be paid for the work they do and that they may just as well withdraw the service and leave it to somebody else to provide cervical cytology. That cannot be in the interests of women in rural areas.

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

I urge the Minister, who I know is listening to these points, to consider them seriously, for they are all real problems put to me by real doctors.

Another problem relates to minor surgical operations. In Scotland the principle has been recognised that in rural areas, provided the doctor does five procedures in a month, he will be paid for those procedures. But under the contract which is sought to be imposed in England and Wales, on rural as well as on urban doctors—and it is only the rural doctors who can do large-ish numbers pro rata of surgical procedures—they are told that they will be paid for minor surgical procedures only if they do five in a session.

I can tell the Minister what will happen. A patient will go to see Dr. Jones. Dr. Jones will explain that he would like to do his surgical procedure but will be paid for it only if he does five in a session. He tells the patient that he will collect five and then the patient can come back and have his surgical procedure carried out. So Mr. Evans visiting Dr. Jones may have to wait a month before his surgical procedure is done.

What happens now is that Mr. Evans, a patient who may live 15 miles from his doctor's surgery, will go to the surgery and will have the minor procedure done on a one-off basis by appointment. That is serving the consumer. That is fulfilling the aspiration that the Government rightly have for the medical profession.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): The 20-hour rule for GPs will prevent doctors in rural practice from carrying out the procedures that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has mentioned. This will restrict their opportunity to carry out minor surgical procedures. I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend will agree.

Mr Carlile: Yes, I agree with that. It reinforces the point that I was making.

I wrote to the Secretary of State in detail on 30 March setting out my misgivings about the GP contract for rural services, and I await his reply to those specific questions with great interest. I will mention two now. The Government's proposals mean that there will be far fewer part-time general practitioners. This is very much against the interests of women, in particular, for there are many women doctors who are perforce rather than by choice part-time practitioners. Some live in my constituency. The payment arrangements—effectively, the removal of the basic practice allowance—mean that practices will be disinclined to employ women part-timers in the future. As it is, it is very difficult in some areas for women to find a woman practitioner to go to—and many wish to, for very good reasons.

I ask the Minister to consider this and to try to ensure that the part-timer, particularly the woman doctor, providing excellent service can continue working in general practice.

The last point I wish to draw to the Minister's attention is that of reimbursement to GPs for ancillary staff and for premises. One of the great developments that I saw as I grew up in a doctor's household was the improved ancillary facilities provided by successive Governments and the chance given by those Governments to doctors to have better surgeries. It happened in our family practice and in many others that I know well. This sort of provision gave a great impetus to good-quality general practitioner services.

The new arrangements suggest, however, that those reimbursements to GPs for ancillary staff and for rents are liable to be cost-limited and reduced. As a result, general practitioners will seriously reconsider any increase in their staff numbers. Some of my local GPs now employ practice nurses who can provide in some cases a rather more intimate service in minor matters than can the busy GP in his surgery. Practice nurses are a very important part of medical practice in rural areas. But doctors will have to reconsider employing them.

In addition, I am aware of at least one £500,000 surgery rebuilding scheme—not in my constituency but in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey)—that the practice is now considering abandoning as it cannot rely on the reimbursement initially promised to service its great undertaking. The practice consists of doctors who are, in mid-Wales terms, in a medium-sized town. If they do not develop their new medical centre, because of changes in the contract and in the arrangements for payment for GPs, it could be another 20 years before the town's services are improved. That would be a matter for regret.

I ask the Minister, therefore, to go back to his Department and have another look at rural GP services. In particular, we should bear in mind the fact that there is no logical case for saying there should be one thing for rural services in Scotland and something quite different for Wales and rural England. As the proposed contract stands, those rural services will suffer and, I am afraid, it will be the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State who will be blamed.

9.9 pm

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): There was discussion earlier in the debate about the Griffiths report, about which I shall make some brief remarks. Sir Roy Griffiths, as the Prime Minister's health care adviser, has impeccable credentials. The problem has been that he has not come up with a convenient set of recommendations. It appears that the Government have taken longer to prepare their response than the Committee took to prepare the report in the first place.

Chapter 7 of the Griffiths report, paragraph 5, states:

"There is a need for central government to make an early clear statement of the objectives and values underlining its community care policies, clarifying its view of the role of the public sector."

The delay in responding to the report is profoundly unsatisfactory.

We could ask, "Does a delay matter?" It would not matter if there were no problem. We might then ask, "Is there a problem?" Everyone is agreed that certain aspects of the community care policy command widespread support, particularly the concept that health care can best be provided within the community—especially if that means that we can get away from the use of large mental hospitals which, all too often, are a legacy of the last century. It has always been recognised that a problem would arise if a mismatch occurred between the closure of mental hospitals and failure to provide adequate care for patients in the community. Unless community care is adequately in place before patients leave mental hospitals, adequate bridging finance must be made available. My

right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), who made an excellent and cogent speech, used the term "bridging finance", which is the key to the current problem.

It is obvious from the evidence before our eyes that such a mismatch has occurred. Many people have been decanted out of mental hospitals and are now part of the so-called cardboard cities, which are an affront to any society that claims to be civilised. Market research on this need not be involved. Within a few hundred yards' walking distance—never mind driving distance—of the Palace of Westminster, one is likely to encounter such people. I am not suggesting that all those one encounters on these walks are former mental patients, but it is estimated that half of them are.

Some people like the life on the road; others have run away from home to try to find fame and fortune. However, if the usual estimate of 8,000 or 9,000 are sleeping rough in London tonight, about half that figure will be former mental patients. Therefore, a large number of people are clearly incapable of sustaining themselves in society without adequate support.

It is clear that voluntary groups are incapable of filling the gap. They carry out admirable work but cannot be expected to shoulder the entire load. Obviously, the Minister will hardly reveal the Government's response to the Griffiths report today, but it would be nice if he gave some sign of when that might come—other than the usual "soon"—or "in the spring". Sir Roy Griffiths reported on 12 February 1988, which was a long time ago. It would be constructive, and certainly helpful to me, if the Minister were prepared to recognise that the problem exists, and that people are living in such conditions, who are on the streets due to the inadequacy of the present system.

I imagine that, privately, the Minister must be unhappy about this aspect of what is otherwise an impressive health care system. Many of my hon. Friends have made reference in the debate to the large sums of extra money and additional facilities that have been provided. That is satisfactory and I support it. However, in this one matter, the evidence is there to be seen by all of us who are prepared, as it were, not to drive past on the other side. It shows that many of our fellow citizens face extreme difficulties tonight because the present policy is not working. What will the Government do about that?

9.17 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I hold no particular brief for the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Fearn) but, having listened to his opening speech, I feel that he deserved a more comprehensive response than he received from the Minister. Frankly, the Minister's response consisted of a series of insults and cheap jibes. Several Conservative Members have made serious points in the debate. I am sorry to have to make these remarks when the Minister has left the Chamber, but I was disappointed that he was not prepared to address the issues which have been raised by hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber.

The Minister's response to the opening speech made it clear that the Government do not have a policy on community care. In the brief time that I have tonight, I shall address myself to some of the implications of the Government's non-policy on this serious and worrying subject. If anyone needs convincing of the fact that the Government's ideological blinkers have so often overridden any element of human concern, they need only look at community care. By allowing the policy on community care to be determined by the free movement of market forces, they have set back proper community care by decades.

It is important to consider in detail the consequences of a market-based policy of community care, because, if the Government have a community care policy, it is based on the movement of market forces. I shall pinpoint one or two matters relating to the private sector care of the elderly which worry my constituents, many hon. Members and me.

I listened to the observations of Conservative Members talking about the amount of money which has been put into community care by the Government. Huge amounts of public money are being mis-spent in the name of community care. There are people in institutions on income support who do not need to be there and would be far better cared for outside them, in their own communities, with proper community care.

The Minister mentioned the figure of £1 billion being spent on income support in the current financial year. That is the figure that was given by the Association of Directors of Social Services for the previous financial year. I suspect that it is a conservative estimate and that, if one attempted to find out what the figures were at local level, one would find that the DSS does not keep records of the amount of money paid in income support to private residential care. Therefore, we are talking about a guesstimate.

A year ago the Public Accounts Committee said that up to a quarter of income support claimants in residential care could have remained in their own homes if they had the proper community services and support. At least £250 million per annum is being spent on residential, institutional care for people who do not need it. That is the result of a free market policy in community care.

There is also a huge hidden cost to the public purse at local authority level. Problems arise time and again in local authorities' policing of private residential homes. The hidden cost is in the homes that have to be closed and the court cases which, according to the social work press, are happening virtually every week. There are disputes over deregistration and qualifications and conditions on registration. All that is costing public money.

In allowing such a free market policy to rule community care, the Government have developed enormous regional differences in the investment of public money. David Lane, the director of social services in my local authority, Wakefield, compared the amounts paid out in the south coast belt—Devon, Dorset, Hampshire and east and west Sussex—where the population is around 4·5 million and there are 26,000 beds in the private sector, with west and south Yorkshire, where the population is 3·25 million and there are fewer than 4,000 beds. Assuming that 50 per cent. of private beds are paid for through income support—a reasonable assumption—at an average cost of about £8,000 per annum, he calculated that the average authority in the south coast belt would have an annual income of £11·5 million per annum, while in west and south Yorkshire the amount would be £2·2 million. That is an enormous redistribution of public funding from the poorer areas to those with substantial resources.

We have also seen a huge distortion in the type of support services available to the elderly. It saddens me to say this. I entered social work, working with the elderly,

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

back in 1968, at a time when we were proud to boast that we were reducing institutional care and building small homes rather than huge, isolated institutions. Now we see the resurrection of care in such large institutions as society's central response to the needs of the dependent elderly.

I disagree profoundly with that policy. It is not in the interests of elderly people. The only people to gain from it have been the estate agents. It has given new life to rundown Victorian mansions, dilapidated country houses and struggling seaside bed-and-breakfast boarding houses and hotels, which are being used to care for people who, in many cases, have been shunted miles away from where they come from.

The larger the institution, moreover, the bigger the profits. I have asked parliamentary questions about the numbers of beds in such institutions, but I have not received answers because the figures are not kept. I can see with my own eyes, however, that large institutions are being used increasingly for the care of the elderly. They are once more being used as they were in the 1940s and 1950s and at the time of the Poor Laws.

Care Weekly, a social work journal which I read every week, reported on 7 April that Lodge Care plc, one of the increasing number of private companies involved in residential care, was selling off 12 of its 25 homes. The managing director, Graham Elliott, said that

"it was the smaller homes which were least profitable and had to be disposed of".

I concede that there are some good, small private homes offering homely care: I have visited them. But those are the homes that are being disposed of, on the basis that they are the least profitable.

There is, as yet, no profit to be made from preventive services. The profit-making sector—the market—has therefore moved into institutional care rather than preventing people from entering institutions. Strategies for care, having been left to the market by the Government, are now being determined by large business interests rather than by the needs of the elderly. Ladbrokes, for example, now owns about 1,000 residential and nursing care beds. Boddingtons brewery and the Vaux brewery group are also involved.

Does anyone honestly believe that those organisations are motivated by concern for what is in the best interests of dependent elderly people? Are they involved merely in acts of charity? Of course they are not. We all know that their involvement is based on hard-headed business decisions and profit motivation. They are diversifying into areas where they know that a quick killing can be made. Dependent elderly residents who have no one to stand up and vouch for them are the pawns in this increasingly big-business game.

The Government know that their community care policies are a shambles. That is why the Minister made no defence of them in response to the hon. Member for Southport. He did not even refer to issues raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) mentioned that the Audit Commission had said that community care was in disarray and that the Government were getting poor value for money, which I think is an understatement. The Government have been sitting on the Griffiths report for over a year. The report, in my view, is full of holes: its vision of community care is very narrow, as my hon. Friend has made clear in a document produced by the Labour party. There have been many criticisms of it, but the important point is that it provides a basis for thought and debate on a matter that desperately needs both.

Urgent action is needed, rather than the complacency demonstrated by the Minister tonight. If I had more time, as I hope that I shall when we debate the Griffiths report, I should spell out what I think should be done. For the moment, however, let me make three brief points.

First, we need to reverse the present trend back to care in isolated institutions. Choice of care is a myth and a nonsense: the Minister conceded that. Of all the elderly people whom I have admitted to residential care in my time in social work, I cannot think of one who wanted to go into an institution. Sadly, however, the way in which the Government have allowed their policies to develop has resulted in that often being the only option. They have shunted investment into institutional care rather than into preventive community care.

In our debate before Christmas, the Minister virtually conceded his concern about the fact that any woman over 60 or man over 65 could obtain income support, fit as a fiddle, and then go into residential care. The system is nonsense. We must stop this open-ended income support for private care, and redirect public funding towards preventing institutionalisation rather than actively encouraging it.

What could have been achieved in funding proper community care if the Government were not ideologically committed to the role of the free market? What could have been achieved with the amount of money that has been thrown into the explosion of private residential care? What could have been done with all that wasted money? The Public Accounts Committee suggests that £250 million is the sum spent on sending people to institutions who do not need to be there.

What could have been done every year with that kind of money in providing proper community care, home helps, meals on wheels, support units, befriending services, day care, social clubs, community nursing, social support, sheltered housing, and numerous other elements of community care—all of which avoid the need for people to enter institutions and allow them to remain living in dignity in their own communities, surrounded by the people with whom they have lived all their lives?

Imagine what could have been done with that amount of money, had the Government not been tied to the vision of the free market and to the blind dogma that they apply to every area of their policy. To leave the care of vast numbers of the most vulnerable people in our society to the whims of the market, as the Government have done, is scandalous.

9.29 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) because it reminded me that we have something in common—we were both brought up in Yorkshire.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that there is a predisposition for elderly people to move to the south coast or to my own constituency of Fylde on the west coast of England. When I was selected to contest a seat in Lancashire, I apologised for the fact that I came from over the Pennines. However, one day I was told by one of my

supporters, "Don't worry that you come from Yorkshire. Half of Yorkshire is here already." Many people move to different parts of the country because that is where they want to retire and where they wish to be cared for.

The hon. Gentleman's narrow view of the source of care in the community must be criticised, because many of the people who have moved to the west coast of England are impressed by the diversity of care in the community, in both the public and the private sector, that is found there. The hon. Gentleman does not realise that a vast spectrum of resources is available to individuals. It ranges from income support, which the hon. Gentleman also criticised, to the provision of services to people who have adequate assets of their own—perhaps from the sale of their houses—and who currently benefit from the development of sheltered accommodation by the private sector and from the growing development of continuing care that is also to be found in the private sector. However, even those people, as they grow older, may require more institutionalised forms of community care.

The hon. Member for Wakefield criticised the Government's response to the Griffiths report. We would all like to see an early response, but it was not the act of a reluctant Government to ask Sir Roy Griffiths to concern himself with community care. His report opens with the statement:

"Mr. Norman Fowler asked me to take an overview of community care policy."

The Government asked for that to be done and, in the nicest sense, they knew what they were letting themselves in for—a report from somebody who would seek an answer, and an answer of accountability. The Government were aware of the contribution that Sir Roy had made to earlier reforms of the Health Service when they sought the application of his intellect to the problem of community care and his ideas.

Sir Roy produced a brief but enormously thought-provoking response that sought to answer the questions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) pointed out, of bringing together the enormous diversity of community care. I suggest that rather than calling it community care, we should talk about the development of a community of carers. By that I mean the bringing together of all agencies—private and public, voluntary and individual—that make up the concept of community care.

Our country's capacity to care is enormous, and the good will felt towards the elderly is considerable. However, some education remains to be provided in terms of attitudes towards those who are mentally ill, mentally handicapped, or both. If they are to be properly received in their communities as they arrive there from long-stay institutions, we must educate ourselves on the need to receive them positively into our number and to provide them with the necessary care.

When considering recommendations such as those in the Griffiths report, we must decide whether we are looking for a top-down solution or a bottom-up solution. A top-down solution involves the kind of national institution that we would perhaps want to monitor. My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West spoke in great detail about the various models that could be used. I am interested in a solution that grows from within the community. My hon. Friend identified the multiplicity of sources of community care. The essence of community care is the flexible response to the needs of the community.

In my constituency there is one of the finest community hospitals. It is so good that I was recently asked, "Mr. Jack, why is this new hospital opening in your constituency? Is it not a private hospital?" I had to say that it was not. It is a new community hospital opened under the auspices of the National Heath Service. It provides day care facilities, and a broad range of other services for the elderly, including physiotherapy and special wards dedicated to the rehabilitation and training of elderly people to help them re-enter the community.

I visit that hospital regularly for personal reasons, as my mother is there, recovering, we hope, from a stroke. I look around the hospital and I see the quality of the care that is available. It occurred to me that it is an ideal centre to base community care and to set up a buying and enabling agency to cater for the needs of the community as identified by the social services, general practioners and the private sector in rest homes or nursing homes. A buying or enabling agency centred in that hospital could draw resources from the community to provide care for elderly people. It could be broadened to serve the interests of mentally ill and physically handicapped people to provide a broadly based community service.

How do we adapt that on a national level? I am attracted by the suggestion in the White Paper for hospital trusts. By definition, trusts seem to encompass all those who care about a particular matter. We have identified a broad range of sources for community care, so let us imagine a national care trust in which the interests of the Government, the social services and the private sector could be represented and where funds for the various budget heads catering for the needs of the community and the care of the elderly and the mentally ill could be accumulated and redistributed according to need to different parts of the United Kingdom. It is for the communities to ascertain their present needs and try to identify their resource needs to continue and develop existing services.

Community care has been prevented from working, in the way referred to by all hon. Members who have spoken, by the friction between health authority services and the social services. There have been differences of opinion. I used to hear them when I sat on the Mersey regional health authority, where we found it difficult to overcome the frustration at the lack of progress towards the right provision.

The Griffiths report give us the opportunity to seek a solution in which the wheels of the relationship between the different agencies can mesh and run more smoothly. The smoothness with which care in the community can be delivered will mean a great deal. I applaud the comments made abut the need to allow elderly people to stay in their own homes. I pay tribute to my constituent, Mr. Stephen Hay, who runs a private rest home and has developed a private care in the community programme. His wife, who is a trained SRN makes domiciliary visits and supplies a broad range of services to elderly people in their own homes. His service is already over-subscribed, but how much better and how much more caring a service could be supplied if my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State would appeal to his ministerial colleagues in the Department of Social Security to free the shackles on income support and use that money more creatively. Such creativity would allow communities to respond to the many and diverse needs of the elderly and mentally ill patients.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

There is much work to be done, but we have sufficient resources. My hon. and learned Friend referred to the money available through income support. Perhaps he did not have time to mention the £1 billion in attendance allowance. Such expenditure is not a sign that the Government do not care or are being mean with resources. It is a sign that the Government recognise the demographic issues and are trying to respond to them while creating a flexible response that will bring together the best of the private sector and the best of the public sector to provide care in the community.

Sad to say, the problems of the mentally ill have not been referred to in the debate. I say sincerely to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister that the most difficult case with which I have had to deal since coming to the House involved the mother of a schizophrenic boy. She writes to me asking who will look after him when she dies. I have been to the district health authority, the regional health authority and even to my hon. and learned Friend's Department but all they say is, "tomorrow". That lady's tomorrow may come but she looks to me to provide an answer within the community for the problems of her son, Dennis. That is the challenge of mental illness and I feel certain that my hon. and learned Friend will respond to it.

9.40 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I have listened with interest to the discussion and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) on the way in which he opened the debate. It is an important subject and that has been reflected in the speeches.

I listened with particular interest, as I always do, to the speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). Interesting contributions were made by the right hon. Members for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) and for Chertsey and Walton (Sir. G. Pattie). I should like to draw a line under the ministerial intervention in reply to my hon. Friend's opening speech by saying that we should leave past records behind us in the time remaining in the debate and look to the future. I recognise that a subject such as the provision of community care is difficult for the Government because it cuts across Government Departments. Also, I am not daft and I recognise that there are substantial funding implications if we are to get right the future provision of community care.

Having said that, and falling over backwards to be as amenable to the Government as I can, I must say that there is a blockage in the system. It is not right for the Minister to say that it does not matter if time passes while we get the provision right. It is wrong that two and a half years have passed since Sir Roy Griffiths was given his commission. It is a year since he produced his report, and people are suffering as a result of the delay. The lack of planning and the hiatus that has been created by the Government's unconscionable delay is not good enough. It is an indictment, and the speeches made by hon. Members, including Conservative Members, have shown that it is unacceptable.

The difficulties were well rehearsed two or three years ago, before Sir Roy Griffiths was given his commission, by the Select Committee on Social Services and by the Audit Commission. Hon. Members have referred to the points made by those two bodies. I shall point out one or two of the important points that remain with us. The problem confronting the House is that community care is delivered by a vast array of organisations with different structures and different funding mechanisms. No one has overall responsibility for co-ordination. I had hoped that the debate would produce an indication of how the Government will resolve that confusion or, indeed, whether they intend to do so. That is the key question which has suffused all the arguments that have been deployed.

The funding mechanisms that the Government have been using—as I have said, there is a difficulty with different Departments being involved—have sent conflicting signals to the people responsible for the discharge and provision of the services. Health authorities have been cash limited, local authorities have been rate-capped and the DSS, particularly in relation to residential and nursing home provision, was demand-led and the provisions have been produced on a demand-led basis. The Minister is beating his chest and saying that the Government have increased expenditure from £10 million to £1 billion in that sector, but that was not planned. The Minister is making a virtue of something that took him and the Department by surprise. The Government must resolve the different funding mechanisms. That may be difficult, but they must grasp the nettle.

Sir Roy Griffiths was asked to consider the geographical discrepancies between local authority and health board areas. It is extremely difficult to achieve coherent delivery of community care. The two-and-a-half-year delay has been quite unreasonable.

Community care will inevitably become more important, given the increase in the number of elderly people and the demographic changes that will occur between now and the year 2000. The Government are also considering the OPCS report on disability, and I pay tribute to the work done by the hon. Member for Monklands, West on that. District health authorities have been closing hospitals and local authorities have been finding it increasingly difficult to train and obtain funds for social work departments.

Three clear messages came from the Griffiths report. First, Griffiths gave local authorities a clear vote of confidence on the way in which they currently discharge their duties and the way in which they will do so in the future. That may cause the Prime Minister and the Cabinet some ideological difficulties, but only a planning role would be involved. Griffiths was suggesting an essential co-ordinating role, so Conservative Members should not put about scare stories of local authorities being given tremendous extra powers, which the Government do not want. Griffiths's recommendation was broadly right, and if local authorities are not involved in co-ordination, another agency should be.

Secondly, the funding recommendation is fundamental. The idea of a community care grant paid for from a local authority's agreed overall plan is extremely attractive. A Minister for community care, whoever he or she may be, would have some input into agreeing such overall plans, so, again, the Government need not divest themselves of control of these important funding systems.

Thirdly, the delivery of tailored services to meet individual client needs is an important improvement that which the Government should embrace.

There are only three, or perhaps four, options open to the Government. They could fully implement the Griffiths report, but people would accept phasing if the Government made it clear that they accepted the broad tenet and thrust of the recommendations. Alternatively, they could opt for limited acceptance of the report and engage in consultation on the need for joint planning, setting up community care managers and funding for training and pump priming. We believe that that would be a second-best alternative which would result in a lack of overall planning and co-ordination, which, more than anything else, is needed.

I should be worried if the Government placed responsibility for community care with another body jointly funded by health authorities and local authorities. Perhaps more worrying are scare stories that the Government may be considering entirely privatising community care and handing it over lock, stock and barrel to the private sector.

Mr. Mellor *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Kirkwood: I see the Minister shake his head. He seems to be ruling that out of court. If he is prepared to say that in his response to the debate, he would allay some of the fears that have been expressed to me recently.

The Minister must accept that there is overwhelming support for the Griffiths solution. If the Government set their face against the report, they will do so at their peril. They must bear in mind important issues such as the fact that there is no correct way of providing care in the community. It is right that there should be plurality of provision, diversity and local initiatives. The Griffiths report made a virtue of that and drew it to the fore of the argument when it said:

"The aim must be to provide structure and resources to support the initiatives . . . the innovation and the commitment at local level and to allow them to flourish; to encourage the success stories in one area to become the commonplace of achievement everywhere else. To prescribe from the centre will be to shrivel the varied pattern of local activity."

That is the essence of the Griffiths report.

I implore the Minister to give us some idea when we shall receive a statement about what is happening in the Cabinet committee carrying out the review. Is it going over all the ground again? Is it commissioning its own evidence? Will that evidence be published? There are a host of questions. This debate was designed to elicit the answers from the Government. I implore the Minister to use the short time available to him to try to open the doors of Whitehall on this important subject and to tell us what is going on.

9.51 pm

Mr. Mellor: I spent last evening discussing the vexed question of AIDS with a group which included the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), and he knows how much I agree with his insights on that matter. It is a pleasure to follow him in this debate. I am sorry that I cannot satisfy his curiosity on all his points, although I found his speech interesting and valuable. As the debate has progressed, it has proved possible for hon. Members of all parties to come to grips with the complexity of the issue.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no question of privatising community care, but the clear analysis given in the Griffiths report needs to be tested against certain other competing possibilities. That is done purely in the context of provision within the public sector, while allowing proper access to provision made by the voluntary services and by private providers, which the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), as he made clear in his opening speech, saw as a part of his party's policy.

I can assure the House that we do not want to take a moment longer than necessary in considering the report, and I hope that it will not be long before a full statement can be made. During the debate, there was no shortage of points on which we could all agree.

I am sorry that I missed the first half of the speech by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). He was right to remind me of the debate we had before Christmas, when we shared some of the insights he mentioned. He mentioned factors that are very much at the heart of our consideration of the Griffiths report. But I am sorry that he felt compelled to say that we have no community care policy. We have a community care policy that meets the points that he emphasised; hence the care we are taking in analysing the Griffiths report.

It is the key to our policy that people should be able to live their own lives for as long as possible and that we should respect people's independence, and work to protect it. It is our policy to ensure that it is only in the final analysis, when other community-based options are no longer viable, that people move into long-term residential care. That is why I am dissatisfied with the absence of a gatekeeper role. As those are our basic beliefs, there has to be a range of community services, from domestic assistance to home helps and nursing care, going on to residential care. We want to ensure that those services can be provided by a range of different providers but although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) made clear, that is not an easy thing to achieve, we must achieve it and it is a priority for us to do so.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) made his points with his customary vigour and clarity. I well understand why he and some other hon. Members representing rural areas are concerned about the contract and that nothing should be done to damage the expansion of rural practices, to which, as the hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledged, we have committed so many resources. Indeed, we have played a full part in revolutionising today's primary care, when compared with what it was when the hon. and learned Gentleman first became conscious of it. Rural doctors have nothing to fear from the changes that we propose. The various arrangements for the contract will make it easier, not more difficult, to take on practice nurses. Those are matters of hard practicality, not of principle and certainly not of dogma.

We are concerned to try to ensure that we achieve greater consistency in primary care not only by putting within the contract a basis for rewarding general practitioners for the efforts that they have made, but by creating incentives for them to do more. That is a practical business. I assure the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery that we are looking at the various points that have been raised, not only by Members of Parliament following the extensive discussions that we know are taking place with doctors, but also from our own discussions. I have been having at least one meeting and often two meetings with GPs every day for the past

[Mr. Mellor]

fortnight, and I shall have another large one in the west country tomorrow. That is not being done as a public relations exercise. We are listening, and we are taking note.

The draft contract that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has submitted is not necessarily the last word. Attention has been drawn to the Scottish contract, which was issued following discussions here in England. We shall not hesitate to make changes to the contract if we are persuaded that the present arrangements do not achieve what we have set out to achieve. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman finds that helpful. I shall certainly take careful note of what he has said.

Mr. right hon. Friends the Members for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) and for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) raised a question with which I chose not to deal in my opening speech in this short debate because, although ministerial contributions could expand endlessly, I wanted the opportunity to hear the anxieties of the House. I left out the important points about mental handicap. I accept that it is essential for us to justify not only the necessary policy of closing the large Victorian institutions for which nobody would want to make a strong case, but to emphasise that we have managed to build up in the community facilities which mean that people are not left to wander abroad, but have facilities in the community that enable them to lead, we hope, an altogether more satisfactory life.

It is worth noting that between 1976 and 1986—we must remember that there has been continuity of policy on this subject—the hospital population of people suffering from mental handicap fell by about 15,000 places while the number of day care and residential places in the community rose by 50 per cent. over and above that to a total of 26,000. Expenditure on services for mentally handicapped people increased by 62 per cent. over the period 1978-79 to 1986-87.

We aim to ensure that no institution is closed if there is not the proper provision in the community to ensure that continuity of care is provided. I am well aware that hon. Members of all parties have expressed concern about whether that has been achieved in every instance. Indeed, we have under active consideration the question whether there needs to be some fine tuning of our policy in this respect. That matter is being considered, as well as the proposals of Griffiths, and I hope that we shall be able to announce our conclusions shortly.

Another question that I did not have time to deal with is that of carers. Of course, through the invalid care allowance, through our £10 million policy of innovation throughout the country, under the "Helping the Community to Care" banner, we are committed to assisting carers. These are all revolving policies, which I look forward to having future opportunities to debate in the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 41, Noes 159.

Division No. 167] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kilfedder, James
Livsey, Richard
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth

Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Michael Fallon.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 147, Noes 41.

Division No. 168] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swin Jon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Maclean and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Alton, David
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Alan Teale.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Speaker forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House expresses full support for the Government's policy of community care and for the proposals set out in the White Paper, Working for Patients; commends the Government's record on the funding and development of primary health care and community care; and believes that the White Paper, together with the Government's earlier White Paper, Promoting Better Health, will help family doctors to develop the services which they provide for their patients, strengthen the provision of primary care in general and complement the development of policies for community care, improve the quality of care for all patients, and ensure that all those concerned with delivering health care make the best use of the resources available to them.

Barnburgh Colliery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

10.23 pm

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): I appreciate the opportunity to discuss in the House a matter that dramatically affects my constituents. In an area that already suffers from high unemployment, the loss of another 775 jobs is a dramatic blow. Barnburgh colliery is covered by the review procedure and its closure is a matter for discussion between unions and British Coal, which will listen to the ideas and propositions of the unions and will go away and think about them. I do not intend to interfere in any way with the negotiations.

I know that the Minister tends to take a Pontius Pilate stance on the issue because the Government take the view that colliery closures are matters for the commercial judgment of British Coal. We are speaking about social problems, real human problems that affect my constituency. The Government should accept some responsibility because perhaps they have been involved in misleading the country in the last few years. I recall that, during the miners' strike, a duly elected president of the National Union of Mineworkers was called a liar and a scaremonger when he prophesied a huge pit closure programme if the miners were unsuccessful in that dispute. History proves who was telling lies and who was telling the truth. Many hon. Members owe Arthur Scargill and the British public an apology because that pit closure programme took place.

We had thought that it was over, but virtually every month we find that it keeps rolling on. In pits that we thought, and had been told, had some sort of future, union officials are suddenly sent for and virtually given a closure date. Barnburgh colliery falls into that category. We were promised that it had reserves of 15 years, and then the officials were called in. The manager suggested that there was no need to go through the review procedure, a procedure accepted by all sides. This I find despicable. Nevertheless, because of pressure from the union, the procedure has been used.

The work force are told that, regardless of money that has been spent, a seam is unworkable because of geological conditions, even though there is evidence to suggest that the management was told that it was using the wrong mining techniques. So after all that money has been spent, we find that suddenly, for geological reasons, the reserves have gone. I have had some experience in mining—26 years of it—and I find it unacceptable that, with today's mining and surveying techniques, such a view should be put forward. It just should not happen.

We have finally reached the point where we must ask who is managing our pits and who makes these incompetent blunders. It is rather ironic that the last pit managed by Barnburgh's manager was Cortonwood. He seems to be an unfortunate manager. It was in his last pit that the Government organised the dispute with the miners.

Quite apart from the question of reserves, the unions were sent for, shown the financial position and told that the pit had lost £600,000 over a period of time. When the union officials looked through the books they found a figure of £125,000 for transport from the washery plant associated with Barnburgh shown as an expense for transport from that washery plant to another colliery for blending purposes. When the officials argued that the receiving colliery normally accepted that expense, British Coal said that the book-keeping arrangements had been changed.

British Coal, therefore, seems to be in the business of making unprofitable any pit that it chooses. It is very distressing. Hon. Members may have difficulty in understanding that point, but the truth is that, while British Coal appears to lurch from crisis to crisis and react only with further pit closures, it really knows just what it is doing. If it does not, the question of its competence should be raised.

British Coal talks of problems with market forces and competition in the energy industry when I sincerely believe —or I would not say so here—that it is preparing the industry for privatisation by these closures. It may seem strange to speak of closing pits to prepare for privatisation, but I believe that British Coal, on behalf of the Government, is preparing nice, neat little parcels, ripe for the picking by the Government's friends on the stock exchange. The Government may say that they believe in free market forces, but that is inconsistent with their actions, because they have more sympathy for other sources of energy. We have only to look at the protective cocoon that they have thrown around the nuclear energy industry in the Electricity Bill to establish that. It is a fact that market forces prevail in one energy industry—coal —but the nuclear industry is cocooned.

Without a mandate, the Government and British Coal are using taxpayers' money to prepare the industry for privatisation. That is their declared intent if they are returned to government after the next election. I am sure that the Minister will laughingly deny that and speak of the investment that the Government have put in. In fact, they have clawed more back in debt charges than they have put into the industry. That is another burden which the industry has to bear.

Many hon. Members and I are concerned, and if the Minister says that our fears are unfounded, I challenge him to set up a public inquiry into the management of British Coal and its directors. Constituents such as mine already have high unemployment as a result of the policies of the Government and the coal industry. We have a right to know the truth.

I shall not go into the specific problems at Barnbur 'h, but Government policies have contributed to its proposed closure. Without a mandate from the House or a general election, the way is being prepared for privatisation. That is the truth. If the Minister wants to prove that I am wrong, and allay my fears, I would welcome a public inquiry into the management of British Coal, because I cannot accept that it is so incompetent as to come up with the old ideas about unworkable resources. I have worked in the pits and know that modern technology protects them from that. If modern management has brought about such a state of affairs, questions should be asked.

10.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): The hon. Member for Barnsley, East (Mr. Patchett) has quite properly raised the question of the future of Barnburgh colliery, which he also discussed, in his capacity as chairman of the miners' group of Members of Parliament, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of

State on 21 February this year. My right hon. Friend said at that meeting that individual colliery closures were matters for the judgment of British Coal, in which Ministers did not intervene. That remains the position. Barnburgh colliery, which started producing coal as long ago as 1917, is one of 18 deep mine collieries at present operating in British Coal's south Yorkshire area. Generally, the south Yorkshire area has reserves of good quality coal, although these have been extensively worked on the western side of the coalfield, and operations are now increasingly concentrated on the deeper reserves to the east.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, East may make snide comments about this, but it is a fact that massive amounts are being invested by British Coal on expanding production on the eastern side of the coalfield. For example, £140 million—no small sum—is being invested in Maltby colliery to double its output to 2 million tonnes a year. Large sums are being invested in heavy duty equipment at Silverwood and Rossington. Nationally, a massive investment programme continues to run at over £2 million every working day. The resulting increases in productivity are the reason why we are confident that, if the pace of improvement can be maintained, the British coal industry will be able to compete with imports for the bulk of its business. That process does imply the closure by British Coal of pits that are uneconomic.

Although decisions about the closure of individual units are the management responsibility of British Coal, that does not mean that British Coal closes pits without prior consultation with the work force. The modified colliery review procedure, agreed between the mining unions and British Coal, provides for the detailed review of the performance of individual collieries, including where appropriate the scrutiny of proposals for closure at three levels: local discussions, national appeals and ultimately the independent review body. The last stage is chaired by an eminent independent individual who is acceptable to both sides and whose report, while not binding, is given full weight by the corporation in reaching its final decision. Barnburgh colliery has reached the stage of national appeal.

The consultation procedure for considering closure proposals is the most comprehensive process of its kind available to any industry. It allows representatives of the work force to submit evidence throughout the three stages of the proceedings. The Government are not at any stage a party to these arrangements.

I shall not prejudge the outcome of the review procedure, and in particular of the national appeal meeting between the unions and British Coal that is due to take place tomorrow, but the House may find it helpful if I give a few financial facts about Barnburgh.

At the end of December, the Yorkshire area as a whole made an operating profit, before capital charges, of £40 million for the first three quarters of the financial year. Barnburgh had contributed an operating loss of around £1·5 million. Barnburgh's performance in 1988-89 was not exceptional. In the two previous years it had made losses of £1·4 million and £2·2 million respectively.

In the quarterly review meeting on 24 January, British Coal's south Yorkshire area director referred to five collieries within his area that were giving him cause for concern. One of those five was Barnburgh. The other four were Brodsworth, Dinnington, Thurcroft and Shireoaks.

All four of those pits have subsequently been the subject of their own reconvened colliery review meetings. In each case British Coal has suggested an alternative to closure which has received the backing of the unions. For Brodsworth, Dinnington and Thurcroft, revised production targets were agreed. The fourth colliery, Shireoaks, was placed on development work only.

A reconvened colliery review meeting was arranged for Barnburgh on Friday 3 February. At this meeting, at which the National Union of Mineworkers, the British Association of Colliery Management and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers were all represented, the area director said that there was no method of working the remaining reserves that would result in the colliery being viable. Therefore, he proposed that the colliery should cease production in June once the remaining faces were worked out. The Manvers central coal preparation plant would also have to close.

The area director also took the opportunity to pay tribute to the efforts of the work force, particularly, in relation to the work carried out on the Meltonfield and Newhill workings. He added that there would be no compulsory redundancies. Those wishing to remain in the industry would be offered alternative jobs at other collieries within the south Yorkshire area.

It is worth emphasising that no compulsory redundancies would be involved and—perhaps equally important—no moves of necessity to collieries outside south Yorkshire. Men who wished to be transferred to other units would receive the short-distance transfer payment. Men opting for redundancy would be eligible for the enhanced terms that are available from British Coal until 26 August.

The voluntary redundancy terms offered by British Coal are of course a matter for the corporation. Last November it announced improved redundancy terms for mineworkers that included an additional £7,500 lump sum payment for those with 15 or more years' service. British Coal calculated that a mineworker aged 32 with 16 years' service would receive total benefits upon redundancy of more than £17,000. A mineworker aged 51 with 25 years' service would receive more than £33,000. Those terms are without doubt very generous and compare favourably with those available in any other industry.

Following the reconvened review meeting on 3 February, NACODS and BACM members decided to accept the closure, while NUM members voted by a narrow margin to fight the closure proposal—52 per cent. against to 48 per cent. for. Under the terms of the modified colliery review procedure, the unions are given one month following the announcement of closure to request that the proposal be referred to a national appeal meeting so that they can give their reasons why the pit should not close. To help them prepare their case, British Coal offers them every assistance. The unions are given the opportunity to undertake a technical inspection and study market performance and financial prospects data.

At the meeting on 28 February, a detailed survival plan was submitted by the NUM. On 3 March, the two sides met again so that British Coal could give its reaction to the survival plan. British Coal estimated that the NUM plan would lead to an operating loss of more than £9 million. In view of that massive projected loss, British Coal felt that it had no alternative but to confirm that its decision on closure should remained unaltered.

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

As the hon. Gentleman said, we now await the outcome of tomorrow's national appeal meeting to see whether the union has managed to modify its plan in such a way as to make the pit profitable.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Is not the bottom line at review meetings the expenditure line? Is the profit line ever questioned? I accept and acknowledge that, as the Minister said, there has been massive investment in the mining industry. Barnburgh is one of those involved. Barnburgh has served as an in-taking colliery for miners who have been affected by closures once, twice or even three times. Although the Minister's claim that there have been no redundancies is true to a certain extent, it is questionable. However, I will not take up with him at this stage what is or is not compulsory redundancy.

Will the Minister explain what is deemed to be an economic mine or an uneconomic mine? The word "economic" is one we have been hearing since Lord Robens' days. The top five or six mines are skimmed off as being economic, the next five or six become uneconomic, and the five or six after that are again deemed to be economic. However, those collieries take on the burden of expenditure associated with the closed collieries. When will it stop?

Mr. Spicer: One of the reasons for the situation that the hon. Member accurately describes is that the industry still receives enormous subsidies. There is nothing new about that. There is no great revelation being made in saying that a pit has become unecomonic. Subsidies have been going to the industry for a long time.

The Government take the view that that process of subsidisation must ultimately cease. It was implicit in the speech of the hon. Member for Barnsley, East and was mentioned by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) that the industry has many debt obligations. That aspect may lie behind the question of the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone as to whether it is fair to include loan interest payments in the calculation of what is or is not economic. The Government say that the time may come when we must examine the industry's financial and debt structure.

We also must bear in mind the fact that those debts or uneconomic investments are real. They have not appeared out of the blue but represent moneys which have been spent and which the industry finds it impossible to recover from its operating revenue. They are not artificial burdens on the industry. At some point the Government will have to decide whether to restructure those debts. But it cannot properly be argued that the pits to which those debts are attributed are not uneconomic as that would be a faulty assessment.

The Government will be examining British Coal's debt structure at some point in the future, but in the meantime, in every way in which operating costs can be set against operating revenue, it is the view of British Coal—the facts speak for themselves—that certain pits are simply not paying their way. Unless we can achieve an industry which is genuinely paying its way, and in which each pit is paying its way in a marginal sense, the entire industry will be dragged down, and ultimately questions will have to be asked about its ability to compete with imports, for example.

The Government consider that a slimmed-down, efficient industry such as British Coal, with good coal reserves and backed by high investment, is well able to compete with imports and will be a great source of pride to the country in the years ahead.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): In his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East (Mr. Patchett), the Minister said that British Coal's regional director in south Yorkshire had five collieries which were causing him great concern and local reviews had been taking place. If those collieries were to be closed, 13 collieries would remain in south Yorkshire. Does the Minister agree that the burden of debt spread over 13 collieries instead of 18 collieries would make some of the remaining collieries uneconomic and inevitably that redistribution of debt would put some of the remaining 13 collieries in jeopardy?

The Minister mentioned the review procedure. Does he accept that there has been a breakdown of that procedure in the negotiations at area level in Barnburgh? The area director and the British Coal team did not accept the NUM's proposals. The Minister said that tomorrow a national review will be carried out. Inevitably it will reach the same conclusion as a consequence of the evidence presented by the NUM. Does the Minister accept that there is a case for some independent arbitration that, for whatever reason, might consider that Barnburgh colliery should not close, and that the decision to close the colliery should be taken on the basis of an independent assessment of the future of the jobs at that colliery?

Mr. Spicer: On the hon. Gentleman's first point about the focusing of debt, I certainly did not say anything about the future of the other pits. That is a matter for British Coal, which no doubt will review their performance, but no clear decision has been taken on whether they should be closed. There is some merit in what the hon. Gentleman says about the need to examine the capital and debt structure of British Coal, and the Government fully concede that.

When assessing the viability of a pit it is probable that the assessment will be made upon genuine operating costs and against genuine revenue. I would not want to dispute with the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Buckley) that the time may come for a reassessment of British Coal's debt, but I do not believe that one can ignore the fact that uneconomic investments have taken place in the past. One has to take that into account when assessing the viability of the pits.

On the review procedures, there is a third level at which the matter can be considered, and the hon. Member for Hemsworth is aware of that. This is the eve of the appeal, and I would not want to prejudge what I am certain will be an objective assessment of the circumstances. As the hon. Gentleman said, the NUM has, up to now, disputed the position at local level, and it will put its views tomorrow. If it comes up with a plan that is credible and acceptable to British Coal, it will cast a new light on the matter. I do not want to go into that any further, as I do not want to inhibit the objectivity of the discussions. Hopefully, on the basis of that response, we can await tomorrow's events and see what they bring forth.

There is no doubt about the Government's intentions for the British coal industry. Our intentions are often misinterpreted. The Government are, rightly, piling money into the coal industry because it is a great national asset. The Government want that asset to reach its full potential in the interests of the British economy. It is our desire that the industry will beat off imports. However, for the purpose of efficiency and the well-being of electricity consumers particularly, we will allow imports to compete, but, as I have said, we hope that the British coal industry will beat them off.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 20 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read a Third time on Thursday 27 April.

HYTHE, KENT, MARINA BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

WENTWORTH ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE SOUTHBANK BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 27 April.

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (HULL) BILL *(By Order)*
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tourism

1. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has yet received the report of the review team on tourism policy in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Viggers): The team undertaking a review of tourism policy in Northern Ireland is due to make its report to me by the end of April. I will consider this report, and consult as necessary, before making an announcement on future strategy.

Mr. Colvin: I note that reply, but will my hon. Friend assure the House that the review has taken into account the submission from the Federation of the Retail Licensed Trade, Northern Ireland, especially with regard to accommodation grants? Does he agree that it would be better to give grants to, say, 100 pubs, each of which would provide three rooms, than to give a grant to one 300-room hotel? The grants should be spread around more evenly. Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that that is especially important this year because all the indications are that forward bookings for holidays abroad are falling off and there is every chance that people will want to take holidays at home?

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend is on to a good point. The Government have shown that they recognise the significance of the licensed trade in public houses by changing the situation that existed until last year, whereby public houses in Northern Ireland could not offer overnight accommodation, in legislation that was taken through the House by the Under-Secretary of State my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham). Pubs in Northern Ireland have now been brought into line with those in the United Kingdom and public houses can now take in guests, provided of course, that the accommodation meets the registration requirements of the Northern Ireland tourist board. I cannot anticipate the conclusion of the review, but I shall bear my hon. Friend's points in mind.

Mr. Kilfedder: In my view, despite terrorism Northern Ireland is the finest place in the entire world, with kindly, friendly and generous people. Does the Minister agree that money invested in tourism, with financial support from the Government, will help to counter the bad image presented by the media? If more foreigners come to Ulster they will see that it is a delightful place and that what I have said is true.

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Despite the magnificent recreational and sporting facilities in Northern Ireland, there has not been the number of tourists that we would like and who would enjoy a visit to Northern Ireland. A high proportion of visitors to Northern Ireland are visiting family and friends or are on business. We want to ensure that the assistance that is provided by the Government is properly focused on holiday visitors.

Mr. William Ross: Given the tremendous interest that has been aroused by the recent expenditure on Giant's Causeway, is it not clear that investment in tourism is of great benefit to the community in Northern Ireland? Will the Minister and the Government therefore move away from the idea of promoting Belfast and Londonderry as the principle centre of tourism and look closely at the north coast, where the town of Portrush has many natural resources and great natural beauty and is the traditional and premium tourist resort of Northern Ireland? Will the Government consider giving more than five lines to Portrush in the tourist board's brochures? Surely the whole north coast is worth far more than that and should be actively promoted because that is where people will go to find the peace and beauty of the countryside?

Mr. Viggers: It would not be fair if the hon. Gentleman were to submit that the Northern Ireland tourist board does not work very hard to promote the whole of Northern Ireland as a tourist location. I shall certainly bear in mind the points made by the 80 people who have made written representations and the 40 people who have given verbal evidence to the small team conducting the review. I shall also take note of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Does the Minister accept that the whole coastline of the island of Ireland is a tourist delight? Does he agree that it would be far better if the tourist authorities in both the north and the south were to co-operate and thus eliminate overlap and wasteful expenditure? Does he welcome the call by the president of the Hoteliers and Caterers Association for a tourist council for all the island of Ireland?

Mr. Viggers: The two tourist boards do co-operate. They share some literature and they are studying ways in which they can co-operate further. I shall certainly take note of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Prison Sentences (Review)

2. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sentences of Northern Ireland prisoners have been reviewed over the past 12 months; and what is his policy towards indeterminate sentences.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Ian Stewart): The cases of 170 prisoners serving life sentences and detention at the Secretary of State's pleasure have been reviewed in the past year. Our policy toward indeterminate sentences is to release a prisoner subject to such a sentence when a period commensurate with the gravity of the crime has been served, and when the risk of re-offending in a violent way is considered remote.

Mr. Alton: While I thank the Minister for that reply and for his reply to my recent letter, and I am grateful to him for the developments, especially at Maghaberry prison, will he tell the House what weight is placed on a prisoner's decision to move from a segregated wing into an integrated situation such as in Maghaberry? Will he also tell the House how many reviews he expects to carry out next year?

Mr. Stewart: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a numerical answer to the second part of his question, but, if I can give him a reasonable indication in correspondence, I shall do so.

The moving of prisoners to integrated conditions, such as in Maghaberry is certainly taken into account as a positive step, but that must be considered against all the other circumstances of each particular case.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Minister tell the House why ex-members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who are serving prison sentences, have served very long stretches without being favourably considered for review, while members of paramilitary forces—including the IRA—who have been imprisoned for similar acts of terrorism or murder, have been released before serving as long as those RUC prisoners?

Is the Minister aware that certain evidence has now come to the surface concerning the imprisonment of certain UDR men in the Craigavon area? Is the Minister prepared to look at the evidence and consider whether those men should have another trial?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman has raised two entirely separate points. If further evidence is forthcoming, existing sentences are reconsidered under certain circumstances. In such cases, however, the evidence must be genuinely new.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that, regardless of background, religion or occupation, everyone who is reviewed by the life sentence review board has his case considered according to the consistent principles which I gave in my answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton).

Ms. Short: The Minister must be aware that the system of review for indeterminate sentences causes great unease in both communities in Northern Ireland. Are not people required to give undertakings about their political views before they can be released? Is that not completely subjective and does that not mean that some people, who are currently in prison, will stay there for the rest of their lives unless we change the system?

Mr. Stewart: I do not know how the hon. Lady gets that idea. It is important that one of the criteria for release should be that the risk of re-offending, especially in a violent way, is considered to be low, but not on the basis on which the hon. Lady has put it. A whole range of factors is taken into account under that heading.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is it not the case that the present rate of recidivism after committing terrorist offences is already very high? Would not the best way of deterring terrorism be to institute a sentence of imprisonment for the duration of the emergency?

Mr. Stewart: If I heard my hon. Friend correctly, he is not right about those released from indeterminate sentences. The rate of reoffending after determinate sentences is high and that is one reason why we introduced new measures regarding reactivation of remitted sentences under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is the Minister aware that some prisoners released on parole have been under threat from

paramilitary organisations? Is it possible for suitable arrangements to be made for them to work out their sentences in Great Britain?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman's suggestion would fundamentally cut across the normal arrangements for pre-release schemes. If there are individual cases where persons may be under a particular threat that matter can be considered.

Inward Investment

3. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on inward investment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The attraction of overseas companies to Northern Ireland, and their development, is given a high priority by the Industrial Development Board since it recognises that such investment brings new products and technologies as well as fresh management skills.

I am very pleased to say that 1988-89 was a record year for IDB, which promoted seven overseas projects with a job content of 1,856.

Mr. Smith: Is that not good news for the Northern Ireland economy and employment in the Province? Is it not clear that inward investment is making a major contribution to economic recovery? Therefore, will the IDB redouble its efforts, given the fierce competition from other parts of the United Kingdom and from the rest of the Community?

Mr. Viggers: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. Northern Ireland has been successful in attracting inward investment. It is worth noting that, of the projects that have come to Northern Ireland, two have been from Great Britain, one from France, one from South Korea, one from the United States, one from Germany and one from the Republic of Ireland. I look forward to entertaining some visiting Japanese business men this evening.

Mr. Maginnis: Can the Minister assure us that decisions on inward investment do not reflect only short-term benefits? I refer the Minister to the recent disturbing debates in the Irish Dail concerning one prospective inward investor whose attempts to monopolise the beef industry would be to the long-term disadvantage of the producers and could tie Northern Ireland to general allegations of swindles relating to the Irish beef industry and EEC payments.

Mr. Viggers: I noted the remarks to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The purpose of the IDB, when promoting inward investment, is to ensure that the jobs that are promoted are long term and viable.

Mr. Thurnham: My hon. Friend has been successful in attracting inward investment from the French motor industry. If he meets the Italians will he ask them to join the French in being more co-operative by allowing the free entry of cars made in the United Kingdom, whatever brand?

Mr. Viggers: I suspect that my hon. Friend's comments may lie in an area slightly outside my terms of responsibility. I assure my hon. Friend that we are assiduous in courting all prospective inward investments. I am delighted to say that, last year, investment in home industry in Northern Ireland totalled £280 million, supported by IDB assistance of £90 million.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

4. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what subjects were discussed in his recent meeting at Stormont under the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and if he will make a statement.

11. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, held on 5 April.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): The meeting on 5 April discussed cross-border security co-operation, particularly in the light of the murders of Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Buchanan; the review of the working of the Intergovernmental Conference under article 11 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement; the progress through Parliament of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Bill and took note of further work on policy aspects of extradition and extra-territorial legislation.

Mr. Flannery: What view, if any, of the progress of the Anglo-Irish Agreement has emerged from that meeting? When the official view comes out, can we be assured that a statement will be made in this House?

Mr. King: I cannot be sure when we shall complete that review, but when it is completed I certainly hope to make a statement in the House.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Can my right hon. Friend say why the discussions on extradition and extra-territorial jurisdiction have been so drawn out? When does he expect a settlement?

Mr. King: I think that some of the points under discussion are already showing their merits. We are seeking to co-operate as closely as we can with the Irish Government on, for example, extradition, to ensure that we are complying with their requirements. My hon. Friend will have seen the successful extradition only last week, which illustrates that the procedure is working.

With regard to extra-territorial jurisdiction—in other words someone charged being tried in Dublin—my hon. Friend will be aware that, only last week, somebody was tried under that legislation on evidence provided by us and that that person was convicted.

Mr. Molyneaux: The Secretary of State has quoted from the second paragraph of the joint communiqué. Did he press for a return to the earlier arrangement for RUC officers crossing the frontier, which existed before the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed and which permitted them to carry their personal protection and weapons when they crossed the frontier? Is there not a hideous danger in the present rigid, formal arrangement under which they must be met by escorts and arrangements must be made beforehand? Is there not a real risk of security leakage?

Mr. King: I had some difficulty in understanding the right hon. Gentleman's question. If he was trying to suggest that some change has been made in the arrangements because of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, that

is entirely untrue. Those are matters for the Chief Constable and the Commissioner. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that there has been no official change laid down in the arrangements under the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Gow: Since the Anglo-Irish Agreement in its present form has alienated the majority without reconciling the minority and since it is my right hon. Friend's purpose to govern the Province with as broad an assent from the people as possible, does he think that he will succeed in producing a fresh agreement which commands a much greater measure of support in the Province than the present one?

Mr. King: There will be no improvements in the directions desired by my hon. Friend and others unless people are prepared to state their views. I have made it absolutely clear that we shall carry on the basic principles of maintaining the right of the majority to determine their own future within Northern Ireland. That is a cornerstone for which this House has always stood and involves the principle of consent and the principle of the position and security of the majority. We shall also maintain our determination to stand together in the fight against terrorism. We shall maintain our principle that there is a recognisable and perfectly respectable interest by the Irish Government in the situation in Northern Ireland as it affects the nationalist community. On those planks, if anyone wants to advance ideas, but ignores those realities, he will not make progress. Those are the cornerstones of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

After the three years of its operation, I am absolutely persuaded that any alternative formulation which people might like to address is bound to include those principles or it will have no hope of making progress.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that when he has these Anglo-Irish conferences he should come to the House and tell hon. Members what is going on so that the representatives from Northern Ireland in this democratic forum can discuss what is going on at those meetings? As he very well knows, many of the proposals which come to this House through Orders in Council are born at those Anglo-Irish conferences and then come to this House, but we are never told where they come from or who is responsible for them. Will the right hon. Gentleman also check whether his facts are correct because the last time that I was over the border—escorted—the guns were taken from my escort, while on other occasions the escorts were allowed to go over the border with their guns?

Mr. King: On the latter point, I denied the attempt of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) to associate that with the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I am aware of no evidence for that. In response to the first point raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), we have monthly meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference and I am not sure whether it would be appropriate to report to the House every time the conference meets. I have made it absolutely clear that I am very willing to talk to all hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies after each conference to discuss the matters under discussion. If the hon. Gentleman is asking whether I will meet him and put him in the picture to discuss issues, if he puts forward his views to me in advance of the conference, I give him an unequivocal assurance that I am ready to do that at any time.

Mr. Mallon: Can the Secretary of State inform the House whether the recent Provisional IRA attacks on the north-south rail link were discussed at the last meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference? Can he confirm that both Governments are determined to keep that line open at all costs? Will he give the House an assurance that under no circumstances will the Provisional IRA's aim of destroying that vital social and economic link between the two parts of the island be allowed to succeed?

Mr. King: I can confirm that this matter was discussed at the last meeting, and that there is complete identity of view between the two Governments on the importance of maintaining the rail link. I think that we all recognise the very real hardship that disruption of the link is causing, not only to Ministers or other such people, but to ordinary people who wish to go backwards and forwards. People use that line to visit families, and for various other purposes. It is they who are being very severely disadvantaged. We recognise also that real problems may well be caused by additional heavy road transport, and that people may be inconvenienced significantly. For all those reasons, we stand together in our determination to maintain the rail link.

Mr. Bill Walker: In the discussions, will my right hon. Friend draw attention to the reality of the situation in the United Kingdom? Any discussions affecting the structures or method of operation of Government or local government in Ulster are bound to have an impact in Scotland. That must always be taken into account, otherwise we could have a break-up of the United Kingdom, coming from Scotland.

Mr. King: I think that I shall stick to Northern Ireland, which occupies my time fully. Of course, the point that my hon. Friend makes is right, and one is conscious of the implications. Throughout my time as Secretary of State I have stood strongly in support of the cohesion of the United Kingdom, and should be very concerned about any risk to the Union.

Mr. McNamara: Is the Secretary of State aware that in his reply to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) he has the general support of Opposition Members? I refer to the principles that he was enunciating about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Is he aware that we welcome the fact that the Intergovernmental Conference is not now concentrating solely and specifically on security measures but is stretching its range of interests into social and economic matters? In that context, has the right hon. Gentleman discussed with the Republic of Ireland the effects of the Single European Act upon the economies of both parts of the island—in particular, with regard to the border areas?

Is the right hon. Gentleman certain that Northern Ireland will be able to get the maximum benefit from the expansion of the European Community structural funds? Has he discussed with the Republic the question of joint proposals for integrated development on both sides of the border?

Mr. King: We are certainly very interested in seeing what the implications might be. In a constructive sense, in

respect of industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, had a conference with the Irish Minister for Industry and Commerce, in Louvain, Belgium. They discussed the potential, within the European Community, for co-operative development. Points about tourism have already been raised. Manifestly, this is an area in which considerable benefits are to be derived from co-operation. I am particularly interested in the impact of 1992 on the island of Ireland. It might do some interesting things to what is euphemistically called "the import-export business" along the border. If that happens, it can be only for the good as well.

Regional Rate

5. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the percentage increase in the regional rate for Northern Ireland for the year 1989-90.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The increase is 12·63 per cent.

Mr. Ross: When the Minister quotes that figure, surely he is quoting the non-domestic rate. Is it not a fact that the increase in the domestic rate is 14 per cent., whereas the council rate increase is an average of 2·38 per cent? Of that 2·38 per cent., some 30 per cent. represents the cost of the local government elections this year. Since the regional rate covers other local government functions also, and since right hon. and hon. Gentlemen on the Government Front Bench support the Government in their rate-capping policy in Great Britain, why do they not rate-cap the expenditure of their own Departments? If they are incapable of controlling the runaway inflation that these figures reveal—and this has been the circumstances for many years—will they please resign and make room for competent people to get the expenditure of Departments under control?

Mr. Stewart: If the hon. Gentleman tables a question asking for the percentage increase in the regional rate, I shall give him that figure. If he wants the answer to a different question, he should table that question. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It sounds a bit Irish to me.

Mr. Stewart: I am sorry if I am enunciating a revolutionary doctrine, but that is what I have always believed I have to do.

Let me give the hon. Gentleman a mathematical answer. Out of that 12·6 per cent., 2·3 per cent. results from a change in the Treasury formula—a reduction from 82·46 per cent. to 82 per cent. in the amount of Exchequer support as a result of the improvement in economic circumstances in the Province; 4·3 per cent. arises from a one-off credit balance in the account last year, and the remaining 6 per cent., which is the real increase related to expenditure, reflects substantial increases in expenditure on education, road maintenance and other programmes, which I do not recall the hon. Gentleman complaining about when we announced them at the end of last year.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the Minister accept that the differential between the regional rate and the district rate is even greater than the figures suggest, because much of the expenditure usually undertaken by the regional rate has been passed on to local government? The general grant factor and community service budgets have been slashed and no money is being given for recreation, and the district councils are having to meet those additional burdens. Does the Minister accept that if he looks at the figures he will see that the differential is all the more remarkable in the cases of the DUP-controlled councils of Castlereagh and Ballymena? Castlereagh has reduced its rate for the second year in a row, this time by 2p, and has the lowest rate in the Province. Will the Minister accept that my question has nothing to do with the local government elections next month?

Mr. Stewart: I shall take the hon. Gentleman's assurance for that.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: Why has a £1 million notional loan charge been added to the cost of collecting the rates and why is there no consultation with the district councils before the regional rate is struck?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman asks me about a specific figure. I shall look up the answer and let him have it. The whole point is that the district councils should be responsible for the district rate and, for the time being, the Government are responsible for the regional rate. Expenditure on local government services in Northern Ireland equivalent to those provided in Great Britain has to be provided through the sum of the district and regional rates. Therefore, the regional rate meets the expenditure, and consulting district authorities about that would not change that picture.

Denominational Schools

6. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will examine the potential for the phasing out of denominational based schools in Northern Ireland and the impact of such a measure on the attitudes towards each other of Catholic and Protestant children.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): As part of the proposed education reforms in Northern Ireland the Government are taking steps to facilitate the creation of integrated schools should parents so choose. But there is no question of the Government imposing integrated education or of denying the rights of those parents who wish to have a denominationally based education for their children.

Mr. Allen: Does the Minister agree that one way to achieve a long-term solution to some of the problems in Northern Ireland is through the hearts of its children and young people, by doing away with much of the religious-based education system there, and will he consider putting additional resources into a more secular system of education? Will the opting-out proposals in the Education Reform Act aggravate rather than assist such a solution?

Mr. Mawhinney: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but those who choose a denominationally based education, which in Northern Ireland is predominantly a Catholic education, amount to almost half the pupils and schools in the Province, where parents have the right to choose, just as they do in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Government also believe, as is reflected in our education reform proposals, that parents should have the right to choose integrated education.

In terms of the new curriculum, as the hon. Gentleman may know, we are also introducing courses in education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage. We have introduced a cross-contact scheme to enable schools from different parts of the community to work together and learn more about each other. In all those ways we are seeking to meet some of the concerns which the hon. Gentleman legitimately expresses.

Mr. Mallon: Will the Minister accept that in my constituency, one very good school, St. Patrick's high school, Keady, has more than 20 mobile classrooms? May we have an assurance that that school will be considered for capital expenditure and expansion quickly, so that the children who are being educated in those mobile classrooms may be integrated into the rest of the school?

Dr. Mawhinney: I assure the hon. Gentleman that all schools that have proposals developed to an extent where it is possible for work to proceed are seriously considered each year in terms of the capital programme. He has welcomed the fact that in the last three years we have had a capital programme in Northern Ireland of about £75 million. There are demands on the budget which exceed our ability to meet them but we give careful consideration to all schools and their needs in determining our priorities for capital expenditure.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Could not a start to integrated education be made in teacher training colleges, where, presumably, parental choice is not such an important consideration?

Dr. Mawhinney: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and he will know that some years ago there was a review of teacher training in Northern Ireland which resulted in the status quo being maintained. He will also be interested to know that I have been having discussions with the two teacher training colleges to encourage them at least to combine more effectively in the training of teachers for education for mutual understanding, and I hope that we may be able to build on that initiative.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To put his answer into perspective, will the Minister give the exact number of Roman Catholic and Protestant schools receiving Government grant?

Dr. Mawhinney: There are 466 primary schools and 118 secondary schools under Catholic management, all of which receive grants from my Department. There are seven Free Presbyterian schools in Northern Ireland, and when the hon. Member asked me a similar question some time ago, I said that I was not aware that any of those schools had sought funding from my Department. I made it clear to him subsequently that if he wished to come and talk to me about possible funding for those schools, I would be happy to see him. That remains the position.

Mr. Maginnis: I agree with the Minister that any phasing out of denominational schools would be seen as an attack on the wishes of, mainly, the Roman Catholic community who wish to have children educated within the ethos of the Catholic Church. But has not the Minister made a fundamental error in the way in which he has sought to bring about integrated education in Northern Ireland by selecting from both the state and the maintained sector a select, privileged and exclusive few who are now being financed at an overgenerous rate to integrate them? Would it not have been better to point out that state schools are there to provide for all children in Northern Ireland, and have encouraged proper evolution in terms of integrated education?

Dr. Mawhinney: In law, all Northern Ireland schools —not just state schools—are open to any pupil wishing to attend them. However, until the education reform proposals were implemented, parents who wished to send their children to state schools and those who wanted to send their children to Catholic schools received all the Government money that was available. Parents who wanted the choice to send their children to schools where they could be integrated in the same classroom as children of a different religion received none of the taxpayers' money. The Government firmly believe that parents have as much right to make a choice in respect of integrated schools as they do in respect of state or Catholic schools.

Sectarian Activity

7. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland have lost their lives as a result of sectarian activity over the past 20 years.

Mr. Tom King: It is not possible to define exactly how many killings were specifically sectarian. However, since 1969, some 2,750 people have been killed as a result of the security situation in Nothern Ireland, including 1,900 civilians.

Mr. Brown: While terrorism, including state terrorism, must be condemned, surely it is time that a Bill of Rights was introduced in Northern Ireland. Otherwise I fear that shootings and bombings will continue. Does the Secretary of State have a view on that? Does he agree that there should be a Bill of Rights? Will he introduce a process of consultation with local communities in Northern Ireland, whether they are Catholic or Protestant? Will he do something politically to solve the tragedy of the North?

Mr. King: Clearly, the figures I gave are an appalling catalogue of human tragedy over the past 20 years. It is against that background that we have sought to address the situation by adopting a determined and positive security policy and by addressing other problems and difficulties—not least those in the social area—that might help achieve the equality of opportunity and the fairness that are relevant to those problems.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the successes of terrorism in Northern Ireland was to destroy the confidence we have in local and regional government there? Does he agree that one way of stopping sectarian killings would be to ensure a secure form of government in the Province? Has my right hon. Friend received any positive suggestions from Unionist politicians in particular about how matters should proceed, so that those politicians may assume full responsibility for governing the Province?

Mr. King: At this stage we have received very little response. I have made it clear that we wish to know the views of elected representatives within Northern Ireland on the way in which its affairs can best be handled in

future. However, while there is an abundance of opinions in Northern Ireland about what the people there are against, it is extremely difficult to find out what they are in favour of.

NHS Reform

8. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with and representations he has received from individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland since the publication of the Government's review of the National Health Service, "Working For Patients."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Richard Needham): I have discussed the White Paper "Working for Patients" with a variety of interests, including representatives of the medical, nursing and management professions and members of health and social services boards, and I will be meeting several more delegations shortly.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Can the Minister name one individual or organisation that has welcomed the proposals unreservedly? Can he throw any light on the impact both on the Health Service and on patients of the recent fracturing of a main sewer in Belvoir, which is polluting the river Lagan?

Mr. Needham: As to the hon. Gentleman's second point, I am keeping a close eye on the situation and will write to him about it. On the first matter, we are involved in a whole series of discussions that are both constructive and sensible. So far, I have spoken to more than 700 senior members of the medical profession. Yesterday, I received a letter from the chairman of the British Medical Association's general medical services committee beginning, "Dear Richard", in which he wrote to express his personal pleasure at our discussions, saying how constructive they were, and how little acrimony there was. A large number of those working in the professions accept that there are many good points in our proposals and wish to work with the Government in implementing them.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is high time that the campaign of misinformation and distortion against the White Paper, which is causing great fear among the most vulnerable in the community, was brought to an end?

Mr. Needham: Yes, Sir.

Ms. Mowlam: Has the Minister received any representations from the plastic surgery unit at the Ulster hospital in Dundonald? If, as the White Paper suggests, the patients at that hospital are among those for whom the Government are meant to be working, why are the Government allowing one third of the 60 beds there to be closed, when there are more than 3,000 people waiting for treatment?

Mr. Needham: As the hon. Lady knows, what happens in the Ulster hospital is a matter for the Eastern health board. Since I have been Minister responsible for health in Northern Ireland, the Government have increased expenditure from £700 million to £950 million. The hon. Lady should go back to her union bosses, with whom she is constantly in touch, and suggest that they find more efficient and productive ways of spending the money that we have given them.

National Curriculum

9. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make an estimate of the number of teachers needed to implement the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not possible at this stage to provide such an estimate, but it is not expected that there will be a substantial increase in teacher numbers to implement the national curriculum; there will, however, be a need for specific programmes of in-service training for existing teachers in support of it.

Mr. Greenway: When does my hon. Friend expect to start implementing the national curriculum and by what date does he expect the implementation to be completed? What is he doing to recruit and train the additional teachers, whom he mentioned were necessary?

Dr. Mawhinney: We hope to introduce the first programmes of study in September 1990, and £30 million will be set aside over the next three years to support the implementation of the national curriculum—including the retraining of teachers to which my hon. Friend referred.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Bowden: Will my right hon. Friend take time during her busy day to consider British Rail's proposals for the Channel tunnel rail link? Will she note that British Rail intends to send every passenger and piece of freight through central London, regardless of their ultimate destination in the United Kingdom? In view of the congestion of traffic in London and its impact on the Warwick gardens area of my Dulwich constituency, and the importance of the proposals to the economy of the United Kingdom as a whole, does my right hon. Friend agree that these matters are far too important to be left to the haphazard and ramshackle private Bill procedure, and should be scrutinised by a full public inquiry?

The Prime Minister: I know of my hon. Friend's concern, but it is British Rail's responsibility to decide the best route for international rail passenger and freight traffic. It has no alternative but to proceed by way of the private Bill procedure. I do not accept that such a procedure is inferior to a public inquiry. British Rail will have to convince Parliament that it has taken the right decisions, and it is right that Parliament should consider such a project, not least for the reasons given by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister understand that Members on both sides of the House and people throughout the country will regard her decision to force through her identity card scheme to be an offence against common sense and common decency? In the aftermath of the terrible tragedy last Saturday, how can the right hon. Lady put the safety of others second to her own pride?

The Prime Minister: I noted the way in which the right hon. Gentleman asked his questions. I would be grateful to him and the House if I could make one or two points—which are relevant to a decision—*[Interruption.]* I am answering the right hon. Gentleman's question, which was put very sharply. May I answer his points?

First, the decision we are asked to take is against the background of four decades of problems with crowd safety and two decades of hooliganism—nearly 300 people have died, and we have the worst record in the developed world. To refuse to pass in this Session the Bill to deal with problems which have already been identified, and then leave ourselves with no vehicle by which to respond immediately to the lessons from Hillsborough—including all-seating stadiums—would be a very grave decision for the House. A Bill completed in this Session would still be able to take account of any interim recommendations by Lord Justice Taylor. Not to proceed with the Bill this Session would delay by 12 months any response to these grave problems. The World Cup is coming up in 1990—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that this is a matter about which the whole House wishes to hear.

The Prime Minister: One part of the Bill——

Mr. Faulds: Absolute abuse.

The Prime Minister: I am trying to answer.

Mr. Faulds: Absolute abuse.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) must contain himself.

The Prime Minister: Let me deal with the very important matter of the "membership scheme" part of the Bill. The Bill itself does not provide such a scheme; it sets up a procedure through which others may propose such a scheme for the Secretary of State's approval. It will then have to be laid before the House. The Bill will not pre-empt any decisions that may be made by Lord Justice Taylor. I do say most earnestly—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is Question Time.

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) and others that the question that hon. Members must ask themselves after two decades of hooliganism is whether they wish to take responsibility for doing nothing for another 12 months.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister is right to say that this is a "very important matter". In view of that, she might have done the House the courtesy of saying that she would make a full statement, so that she could be cross-examined. In the absence of such a statement, let me say to the Prime Minister that it is five days since the Hillsborough disaster, four days since she went to the Leppings lane pen and three days since she set up the Taylor inquiry. Now she is already undermining that inquiry. Does she not realise that by pressing ahead with her legislation she is effectively putting the vital question of identity cards off limits to Lord Justice Taylor?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman can quite have heard what I said, or listened to it. The timetable easily permits anything that Lord Justice Taylor may propose to be taken into account, because the Bill does not provide a national membership scheme.

I suggest that the question that the House must ask itself, and on which it must reflect very carefully—that includes the right hon. Gentleman—is whether it positively wishes, in the face of the country's record of hooliganism and its reputation, to delay for 12 months and do nothing when confronted by the deaths that we have recently seen.

Mr. Kinnock: No one is in favour of doing nothing, but what we want is effective action for crowd safety as well as for football security. The Prime Minister does not understand that. Does she not realise that she can have either what she calls an enabling Bill, or a no-holds-barred inquiry, but she cannot have both? Her course is full of utter inconsistency, as well as great vanity.

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman treats this measure with the seriousness that it deserves. The purpose of the Bill is not only to control the admission of spectators by means of a procedure for a national membership scheme; it also involves licences to admit spectators. I thought that the whole House agreed with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary when we suggested that in future we must have all-seat stadiums. Without a Bill we shall have no possible way of bringing that into effect.

The proposals in the Bill were considered by Mr. Justice Popplewell, recommended in this interim report and confirmed in his final report. They are not being rushed. The final report was three years ago. I suggest that the House should not delay a legislative measure to enable us to take advantage of Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations for another 12 months, and that it would be negligent to do so.

Q3. **Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend agree that recent inward investment decisions show that foreign companies have a long-term commitment to the United Kingdom and confidence in its economic prospects and in the policies of the Government?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Very recently we have seen three big inward investments in this country, Fujitsu in the north-east, Bosch in Wales and Toyota in Derbyshire. That is very good news. It shows that overseas companies recognise the attractions of doing business in this country. I should also point out that British companies, too, are very active in making overseas investments. We live in a global competitive trading environment and it is important that we, too, invest in other countries. So, in both ways, investment is going very well.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is the Prime Minister aware, as the nation is, that the people of Northern Ireland have for some time been concerned about the undermanning in the

Army regiments on duty, particularly in frontier areas? This has now been publicly confirmed. Wil she tell the House what steps are now being taken to give adequate protection, along the frontier in particular?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is considering the problems which may arise over recruitment because of the period of demographic change that we will enter when there will be fewer school leavers. The problem is not yet serious. My right hon. Friend is considering measures to increase recruitment, and we are also considering, and hope to be in a position to say something about it shortly, the decision on the Gurkhas. We will keep the needs of Northern Ireland very much in mind.

Q4. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that for many small businesses the single European market will be truly meaningful only when it is as easy to sell into France or Germany as into the United Kingdom but that at the moment the complex customs documentation is a major deterrent? What progress is being made in simplifying or, preferably, eliminating the paper work?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the single European market offers great opportunities for small companies which have often made for themselves a particular niche in the market and should, therefore, be able to sell widely into Europe. As my hon. Friend knows, we have already introduced a single administrative document which should help these companies very considerably, compared with the previous multiplicity of such documents, and we are considering further whether we can eliminate the need for such documents after 1992. That will depend on the arrangements made for that. We will look at it very carefully.

Q5. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wall: Will the Prime Minister recall that some time ago I asked her about the social, economic and family factors behind the rising number of young homeless? Is she aware that many are being charged under section 3 of the Vagrancy Act 1824 which made poverty a crime? Is not the most graphic illustration of the inherent sickness of her market-led society the rising trend of calls to the Samaritans, 7 per cent. of which are from under 15s and 25 per cent. are from those aged 16 to 24? Will she not now reverse the policies of cuts in benefits to young people, her introduction of student loans and that family-splitting device, the poll tax?

The Prime Minister: We have made it perfectly clear that where young people are in genuine difficulty with their families interim arrangements will be made. I think that that is right. It was, I think, an amendment brought in after the hon. Gentleman first put the question to me. We are putting bed-and-breakfast accommodation on a par with income support and housing benefit. Previously, benefits selectively went to bed and breakfast. I think that that is reasonably fair. There are, of course, far more houses available than there used to be, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that in some areas there are more council houses vacant than there are people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We must also give attention to that.

Q6. **Mr. Rhodes James:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 April 1988.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Rhodes James: Will my right hon. Friend consider today the continuing and unhappy dispute over the salaries of university teachers? Is she aware that the tactics of the Association of University Teachers have been widely criticised on both sides of the House and within the profession? None the less, there is a real problem that must be resolved. Will she consider today the machinery for the negotiations so that we may end swiftly this lamentable dispute and ensure that such a dispute is never repeated?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the present action by some university teachers is to be deplored. I think that the AUT should have absolutely no public support. People often say that the answer to everything is education, yet here we have the most highly educated section of the community depriving their students of an opportunity that they themselves enjoyed. That could have a fatal effect on the future careers of those students. My hon. Friend suggested that there might be alternative methods and alternative machinery. No convincing proposals have been put forward by the negotiating parties concerned. If they were put forward, we would consider them.

Cormorant Alpha Platform (Explosion)

3.30 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the explosion on the Cormorant Alpha platform, the consequent reduction in Britain's oil production and the implications for the price of petrol.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): Cormorant Alpha is both a production platform and the gathering platform for the nine fields in the Brent system, from which the oil is exported to Sullom Voe.

On 18 April, when fitting an emergency shut-down valve on the platform, in accordance with the recommendations of the interim report on the Piper Alpha incident, a gas leak occurred. Shell notified the Department and evacuated non-essential personnel from the platform in accordance with emergency procedures. The leak was repaired but an explosion occurred at 1820 hours. There was no fire or loss of life or injury. The Brent system was shut down as a result of this incident. My inspectors and officials from Shell are now on the platform assessing the damage. Until they have completed this assessment, we cannot estimate how long the system will be shut down.

As a result of this explosion, the loss of production is some 400,000 barrels per day. This amounts to 17 per cent. of United Kingdom daily production.

Petrol prices depend primarily upon crude oil prices and other factors in the world market. Obviously the crucial factor is the total free world oil supply, which runs at approximately 50 million barrels a day. Even though Brent is a crude oil commanding a small premium, production from the Brent field is therefore less than 1 per cent. of world production, and it is impossible to calculate the effect of any temporary shortfall from this field on petrol prices.

Safety is and will remain the first consideration. I can assure the House that every precaution is being taken to ensure that the installation is safe and that my safety directorate will not agree to production start-up until it is satisfied that all safety measures have been taken.

Mr. Doran: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. The Opposition welcome the fact that the evacuation of the platform was, apparently, efficient and that there was no loss of life or injury.

Will the Secretary of State publish his report on the investigation that is being carried out into the causes of the explosion so that the lessons that are to be learnt can be learnt? There is obviously a great deal of speculation as to why there was an explosion three hours after the gas leak was noticed at about 3 pm. It is important that we discover the causes.

The Secretary of State will be aware that there have been a string of disasters and accidents in the North sea in the past year, many of which have resulted in substantial losses of production. There have been the Brent Alpha explosion and the Piper Alpha disaster, with tragic loss of life; the Fulmar Auk and Clyde fields were closed at Christmas; the Brent Delta was closed in the new year; the Dunlin platform was closed in February; and now the Cormorant South platform and the Brent system have been closed. I am advised that nearly 40 per cent. of the total oil production in the North sea has been lost as a result of these accumulated breakdowns and shutdowns in production.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that the loss of 40 per cent. of oil production is the direct consequence of the cuts in maintenance and safety applied by the oil industry after the fall in oil prices in 1986, and an inadequate inspection of safety by his Department? Is he prepared to allow this state of affairs to continue? Has he considered the cost to the country of those failures in the North sea oil industry? On my estimate, the result of the loss of 40 per cent. of the United Kingdom's oil production will be to add £300 million to £350 million to our monthly balance of trade deficit. That is a huge figure by any standard.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the considerable fears of the consumer who has experienced steep rises in petrol prices since the beginning of the year? Since January, the price of petrol at the pump has risen by 24p a gallon. That is a massive increase in anyone's terms and there are genuine fears that there will be further increases as a result of the latest loss of production.

Will the Secretary of State accept that, as a result of the huge loss of production in the North sea, there is no justification for further increases in petrol prices? Does he recognise that the loss of production and consequent increase in oil price is caused by inadequate safety procedures or negligence on the part of the oil industry, and that the industry should bear the cost as part of its normal commercial risk? The cost should not be borne by the already hard-pressed consumer. We know that, if the temporary increases in prices resulting from this shutdown are used by the oil industry to increase petrol and other prices, it is very unlikely to reduce prices when oil prices stabilise. Will he use his good offices with the oil industry to protect the consumer against unnecessary price increases?

Mr. Parkinson: On the first question, we shall make sure that any lessons to be learned from the incident are widely disseminated throughout the industry as quickly as possible, but I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking to publish the report. As he knows, such reports can be used as the basis of prosecution if that is necessary. I cannot prejudge that, and I am not suggesting that there will be prosecutions, but that is a reason why we do not publish. But we shall publish any lessons and make sure that the information is disseminated as quickly as possible.

May I put the hon. Gentleman right, marginally, on the figure that he quoted? We have lost a great deal of production, but it is not 40 per cent. We calculate that it is about 31 per cent.

There is no evidence whatsoever to support the hon. Gentleman's smear on the industry in saying that the accident was a result of cuts in maintenance and safety. I further repudiate the idea that the rigs are not being properly inspected. The rig involved, and all the others, have been inspected, some within the past few months.

The hon. Gentleman grossly exaggerates the effect on the balance of payments. Our best estimate—it is not possible to give a particularly accurate estimate as we do not know how long the platform will be out, but assuming four to six weeks—the effect on the current account could be up £800 million this year.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, price increases are being investigated by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission,

which will look at the recent price increases as it looked at the increases earlier this month. Prices have moved broadly in line with the increase in world oil prices in the past few months. World oil prices have risen by about 70 per cent. during that time, and prices have moved in roughly the same direction. I am not prejudging that, as it is a matter for the MMC which is investigating the matter, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does not my right hon. Friend agree that it would be impossible to eliminate risk completely in an area like the North sea where oil is being extracted? The important thing is to learn the lessons and to implement the measures that result from the inquiries. That the Government have pledged to do. Those of us who are interested in the North sea are appreciative of that. Will my right hon. Friend take note of the comment of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) about concern in the Highland area of Scotland, where it seems that the £2 per gallon price for petrol will happen tomorrow? That is causing great concern. The oil companies claim that problems in the North sea lie behind some of the price increases.

Mr. Parkinson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that it is not possible to eliminate all risk from operations in the North sea, any more than it is possible to eliminate them from the coal industry or any other energy industry. That is no excuse for not making every effort to ensure that a dangerous job is carried out safely. As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran), petrol prices have moved broadly in line with the increases in crude oil prices. There are other pressures on the market. There is an especially large increase in demand from the United States, which is putting further pressure on gasoline prices. I am sure that petrol companies will hear what my hon. Friend has said and will recognise that price increases are extremely unpopular.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Can the Secretary of State say anything more about the disruptive effect of the explosion on work at the Sullom Voe terminal in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)? On petrol prices, the Secretary of State will remember that it is only a few weeks since the Chancellor, at the Dispatch Box, told us that he would not increase excise duties because of the effect on inflation. Since then, the price of petrol has gone up by about 8p a gallon. When do the Government expect to get the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Will the Secretary of State, together with the Chancellor, seek to intervene to make sure that the price of petrol does not go through the £2 barrier?

Mr. Parkinson: As to Sullom Voe, the loss of production represents a flow of oil that will not get there and will not be processed. We hope that the loss will be temporary and that production will be back on stream as soon as possible. A period of a few weeks has been mentioned. There can be no certainty about that until the full scale of the damage has been investigated. My officials spoke to the inspector on the platform less than an hour ago. It does not appear that there is any structural damage, but it is too soon to give a full assessment of the damage and therefore to be able to assess when it will be back on stream. Obviously everybody, subject to the demands of safety, will do everything possible to get it back on stream quickly.

The MMC will report when it has finished its work. I cannot put a date on it. The commission recognises, as do the oil companies, that there is great public interest in the matter, and it will make every effort to report as soon as possible.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, since the Budget, the oil companies have given every impression of operating a cartel on retail prices? If it is true, as my right hon. Friend says, that retail prices are following the price of crude oil, and if, as a result of the incident in the North sea and the consequent increase in the price of Brent crude to $20, there is another increase in the retail price, will he try to ensure that, when the price comes down, as it surely will, there is a corresponding fall in the retail price of petrol?

Mr. Parkinson: The MMC is investigating precisely the cartel whose existence my hon. Friend alleges and the oil companies deny. I do not think that I can anticipate the report.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Recognising the series of grave and potentially dangerous incidents on North sea oil platforms and rigs, with the Piper Alpha disaster leading to vast loss of life, is it not time that the Department of Energy handed over responsibility for safety to the Health and Safety Commission? Is the Minister aware that nearly all the serious tragedies that have occurred recently—in the North sea, at Zeebrügge and at King's Cross—have been in areas where the Health and Safety Commission has been barred from looking into safety until there has been an accident? It has only been brought in afterwards.

Mr. Parkinson: Surprisingly and unusually, the hon. and learned Gentleman has misled the House about the legal position. The Health and Safety Commission has a responsibility for safety and delegates it by agreement and under contract to my inspectorate. Moreover, there is no evidence that separating the inspectorate from my Dapartment would change matters. Although the Opposition consistently say that the same Department should not be in charge of both production and safety, they then draw our attention to the Norwegian arrangements, which are precisely the same: the Norwegian operator is responsible for both production and safety. We do not accept that there is any substance to the hon. and learned Gentleman's allegations. This matter is being considered by Lord Cullen and I have committed the Government to accepting his recommendations. I suggest that the hon. and learned Gentleman awaits that report.

Mr. Speaker: Mrs. Ewing.

Mr. Janner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Not now.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Although the Secretary of State has referred to the safety checks that are conducted on the platforms and the rigs, how extensive are those safety checks, how long does each one last and what is the expenditure on them? As we are now in the third decade of production in the North sea and the age factor

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

must be taken into account, is any emphasis given to the age of platforms? Will the Secretary of State accept that we all welcome the fact that the safety directorate will not open production until it is satisfied that the standard of safety is appropriate, because production and profit pale into insignificance when placed against potential loss of life?

Mr. Parkinson: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady's last point about safety. Indeed, I stressed in my statement that safety is absolutely pre-eminent and no risks will be taken. No permission to operate the platform will be given unless my inspectorate is satisfied.

On the hon. Lady's first point about safety checks, the duty to operate a platform safely 24 hours a day is a duty that Parliament has placed on the operator. My inspectorate is not responsible for safety; the operator is. My inspectorate makes regular visits to ensure that the operator is carrying out that duty. Therefore, it is not fair to put all the responsibility on an official who visits occasionally when it is the operator's duty to ensure that safety is the prime consideration.

So far as the age of platforms is concerned, quite separately from the regular inspections, the certifying authority, which is an independent body, has to give a regular certificate that the platform is safe. The certifying authority supervises the design and construction and subsequently, at regular intervals, has to renew the certificate. That examination is quite independent of my Department. As the Department of Transport is responsible for the movement of people to and from the platforms, the evacuation equipment is inspected by that Department independently. A series of checks and balances is therefore built into the system.

Business of the House

3.58 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 24 APRIL—Progress on remaining stages of the Social Security Bill.

Motion on the Food (Northern Ireland) Order, which is a consolidation measure.

TUESDAY 25 APRIL—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

Motion relating to the Mines (Safety of Exit) Regulations.

WEDNESDAY 26 APRIL—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Social Security Bill.

THURSDAY 27 APRIL—Second Reading of the Children Bill *[Lords]*.

FRIDAY 28 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. Will he confirm that the Government have today published the Bill to outlaw the sale of human kidneys, which is the product of no fewer than four years of laborious drafting by the Department of Health since we originally asked for such a law to be introduced?

When are we likely to get the long-promised debate —in Government time—on the future of the National Health Service, and when will we have the even longer-promised debate on the Government's proposal to substitute student loans for student grants?

Because of the growing concern about the scale and nature of the Government publicity machine and about the propriety of those who are running it, and growing concern among civil servants about the increasing party politicisation of that machine, will the Leader of the House speak to Mr. Bernard Ingham and ask him nicely whether we can have a debate about it in the House?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman asked me four questions.

I am 99·9 per cent. certain that the Human Organ Transplants Bill has been published today, but it will certainly be published this week. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and to the Opposition for the discussions that we have had to facilitate a speedy passage of that important measure.

We have just had a debate on the National Health Service, but, as I told the hon. Gentleman last week, the House will wish to return to that matter. I cannot, however, promise a debate in the immediate future.

I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would not have made the mistake of saying that the Government were proposing to substitute student loans for student grants. The proposal, which is still being discussed, is for top-up loans for students. I believe that the most sensible time for a debate is when the discussions have been completed with the banks and other institutions about the way in which the loans will be administered.

I do not accept the premise on which the hon. Gentleman phrased his last question. I do not accept or recognise the abuses to which he referred. Therefore, the rest of the question does not follow.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): My right hon. Friend said that we had just had a debate on the National Health Service, but he must recognise that that three-hour debate, of which the leader of the SDP took up 46 minutes, was highly unsatisfactory and that we need a full-scale debate on the Government's White Paper before the consultation deadline runs out. Will my right hon. Friend take particular note of the fact that Members on both sides of the House have substantial misgivings about certain aspects of the White Paper's proposals, especially as they affect doctors? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, on this occasion at least, the Government will be willing to listen and to act upon constructive suggestions?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend seeks to encourage me, but the sting in his tail is not acceptable. The Government listen; when they have consultations, they mean consultations, and when they issue papers, they expect views. I cannot add anything further to what I have already said. I agree that Tuesday's debate was not an adequate substitute for a full-scale debate, which I will arrange as soon as I can find the time.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I join those who have demanded that there should be a debate in Government time on the National Health Service.

The right hon. Gentleman must have been present in the House a few minutes ago. Does he not recognise how objectionable it was to the House and to its procedures —he must have been a party to it—that, instead of making a proper statement about the Government's proposals for the Football Spectators Bill, the Prime Minister should have chosen to tell us in response to a question? As there does not appear to be a single Member of the Cabinet who is capable of standing up to the Prime Minister on the subject—as she alone appears to be responsible for it—when will the right hon. Gentleman make arrangements for her to come to the House and answer questions from Members on both sides of the House?

Mr. Wakeham: The Home Secretary made a statement at the beginning of the week. The right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) asked a question and I thought that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave a very full and good answer. The right hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. When my right hon. Friend does not, in the opinion of the Opposition, give a full answer, they complain; when she does, they do not like it either.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May we have an assurance from the Leader of the House that before a final decision is taken on the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into the brewing industry—the consequences of which may be different from those envisaged by the commission—there will be a full debate in this House?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is considering the report; I have nothing further to add, except that I note what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we please have an early debate on the powers of the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive? Among other things, that debate would give the Secretary of State for Energy the opportunity to apologise for accusing me of misleading the House when I am sure that he did not intend to do so. I stated—as was and is the case —that the Department of Energy has responsibility for safety on offshore oil rigs and that the Health and Safety Commission has not; that is all I said. That is absolutely correct, but it is wrong that that responsibility should remain with the Department when there have been a series of actual and potential disasters perilous to the life of the people who work on the rigs and dangerous to the production of oil from those rigs.

Can the opportunity be given to the Minister to resign, to apologise, and thirdly, the easiest step, to ask the Health and Safety Commission whether it will resume those powers regarding the inspection of rigs, which would make people and production safer?

Mr. Wakeham: When the hon. and learned Gentleman started asking his question I had some sympathy with him, but, by the time he had finished his speech, I thought the need for a debate was not so necessary. There appears to be a difference between the hon. and learned Gentleman and my right hon. Friend—I am on the side of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of my hon. Friends will have been pleased to hear from our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that the rigid timetable for the Football Spectators Bill has now been dropped? Does my right hon. Friend also accept that many of my colleagues remain somewhat worried about that largely unloved Bill and believe that alternative measures should have been brought before the House in the new Session? Nevertheless, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a good idea to have a debate on football before the Bill's Second Reading, so that all hon. Members have the opportunity to discuss the matter? If the legislation is to be amended as much as anticipated, the House will be far better informed as a result of such a debate on the Floor.

Mr. Wakeham: What my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said was that it would be a grave step for the House to lose the opportunity of putting into legislative effect any proposals that Lord Justice Taylor might make and to cause those recommendations to be delayed for a further 12 months. It is clear that, during the course of this Session, there is time to make progress on the Bill, and not to finalise it until we have had time to consider what it is hoped will be important recommendations.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I endorse what has been said by hon. Members from both sides of the House about the need for a debate on the National Health Service in Government time. Is the Leader of the House aware that the funding of the Equal Opportunities Commission has not kept pace with inflation, which means that the decline in resources is damaging to women who do not have a full opportunity to use the services of that commission? May we have a debate on that next week, please?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise a debate next week, and I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's strictures on the Equal Opportunities Commission. I believe that it does a good job and that its work should be supported.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Does not my right hon. Friend agree that it is customary to debate a

[Sir Michael McNair-Wilson]

White Paper and that, therefore, the White Paper on the National Health Service would seem to be such a subject for debate? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that that particular White Paper has green edges and is something of a consultation document? Therefore, as the consultation period ends at the end of May, we should have a debate before that date.

Mr. Wakeham: I promised the House that we will have a debate, but I have been unable to go firm on when that debate will be. It certainly will be before we introduce legislation to enact any matters that flow from the White Paper.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Does not the Leader of the House agree that there should be an opportunity to debate how the Department of Transport handles the coastguard service? It is of great importance to all right hon. and hon. Members, given that its efficiency affects the lives and livelihoods of so many of our constituents. Is he aware that, yesterday, the Department of Transport issued a public information bulletin affecting the Aberdeen district of the north-east of Scotland? That bulletin said that the Department was going to downgrade the Lossiemouth coastguard station and change it into a voluntary, part-time unit. Later in the day, the Department had to apologise for making an error in its bulletin. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is now a loss of confidence in how the Department handles the service and that it is important for hon. Members to have the opportunity to raise this matter in the House?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the hon. Lady that this is an important subject. If there has been a mistake, I apologise on behalf of my colleagues who might have made it. I will draw the hon. Lady's point to their attention. I wish that I could promise an early debate, but I cannot. Of course, the hon. Lady may find other ways to raise the matter.

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 499 which refers to the GEC-Siemens bid for the Plessey company?

[That this House notes with grave concern the revised proposals put forward by GEC and Siemens for the dismemberment of The Plessey Company; believes that these proposals deprive the Government of United Kingdom competitive tendering in the fields of avionics, naval systems, radar and defence systems; that they will consign the United Kingdom's leading radar and army communications command and control suppliers, not to mention a number of highly secure programmes, to foreign ownership, that they will deprive the United Kingdom's telecommunications manufacturing industry of access to the lucrative West Germany market; that they will effectively transfer the leading edge of the United Kingdom semiconductor industry, together with its associated jobs and skills to West Germany and that the predator companies have prostituted the principles of the Single European Market in a collusive bid to eliminate a competitor; and calls on the Secretary of State to give due weight to these factors when he considers the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on this matter in due course.]

My right hon. Friend will remember that I drew third place in the ballot for private Members' motions, but mine was not reached on that occasion. I am most anxious that this sort of matter should be debated under the system whereby legislation can be brought in which is inappropriate for an Adjournment debate. In these cases, hostile bids are being introduced very soon after an original bid and that occupies a company in no less than six to nine months of top management effort. If the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has turned down something once, is it right that it should be resuscitated so quickly? That drains a company's resources.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend raises an important matter involving matters of general principle in addition to the particular case about which he is concerned. As he knows, my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is currently considering the report and it would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment on the matter or to have a debate in this House in advance of publication. The announcement by the European Commission yesterday does not prejudice the position of my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): At the beginning of the year, the Secretary of State for Employment, I believe, suspended section 4 grants for the promotion of tourism, until a review had taken place. I understand that the report has now been completed. Will the Leader of the House ensure that that report is published and that a copy is placed in the Library? Will he ask the Secretary of State to reinstate section 4 grants for the promotion of tourism, as their absence is interfering with the work of the national parks and local authorities? If not, could we have a statement explaining why they are not to be reinstated and why the report is not to be published?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an authoritative answer on that point without referring to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. However, I will do that and ask what the position is.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the long title of the Football Spectators Bill will actually allow the implementation of the kind of recommendations which might flow from Lord Justice Taylor's report? Is he satisfied, therefore, that the policy that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has put forward is workable?

Mr. Wakeham: These are matters on which there are greater experts than I. The advice that I have received is that, yes, it would be a suitable vehicle. That is on certain broad assumptions about the type of recommendations which might come forward, but I think that the answer is yes.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wonder whether the Leader of the House can tell us whether he had a long discussion about the Football Spectators Bill at the Cabinet meeting this morning? He need not tell me everything, but did people object or did they just go along with the Prime Minister? Did she just come along and swing her handbag and all the 20 members of the Cabinet toed the line? Is anyone keeping a diary of the events, or is it all left to Bernard Ingham? With the reshuffle coming very shortly and with the Leader of the House having been mentioned in dispatches as one of the likely casualties, I

suggest that it is time to get something on paper before he is kicked out. There is no point in being sacked with just a whimper.

Mr. Wakeham: I think that the hon. Gentleman has television on the brain, that is his problem. I can understand that the hard work which Parliament does week in week out, with interventions from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—sometimes from a sedentary position, sometimes not, but mostly ill-informed—is not as exciting as me giving details of what happens at Cabinet meetings. I can understand that that would be a more exciting debate, but I am afraid that I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): While we are talking about women, may I ask whether we could have an early debate on self-defence courses for women so that I may raise in the House the objections, on the grounds of discrimination, of a very large number of men and women in my constituency, and in the rest of the borough of Ealing, to the fact that Ealing council is to use ratepayers' money to provide a self-defence course, for six weeks in May and June, for lesbian women only? May we have a discussion on this discriminatory proposal?

Mr. Wakeham: As happens from time to time, my hon. Friend brings forth from Ealing some strange matters for the attention of the House. He shares with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) a fervent imagination about what might produce an exciting debate in the House, but I cannot promise him a debate next week either.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Now that the right hon. Gentleman has announced the business until, effectively, 2 May, would he care to think again about the timetable that the Lord Chancellor has imposed on the Green Papers on reform of legal services? This means that the Green Papers will not be debated in this House before the initial closure date. Bearing in mind the fact that the Lord Chancellor has agreed to meet the judges in mid-May, obviously time for consultation has been extended. It would be quite wrong if the Green Papers, which are said to be White Papers with green edges, were not to be debated in this House before the matter was considered further. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can give us an assurance that, towards the latter part of May, Government time will be given for a debate on the whole question of the reform of legal services.

Mr. Wakeham: No, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. As I have said in previous weeks, of course this matter will be debated, but I cannot promise a debate on the Green Papers themselves. Obviously, any proposals will be debated. I shall bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Since today is the 100th anniversary of the birth of Herr Hitler, would my right hon. Friend warn Mr. Delors that the last attempt to thrust union on an unwilling Europe was defeated, largely by a combination of the will power of the British Prime Minister alongside the determination of the British people?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): And the Soviet Union.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not keep a record of the dates of Adolf Hitler's birthday and events of that sort. I have enough to do to remember my own children's birthdays, without bothering with that sort of nonsense. On reflection, my hon. Friend may agree that he was probably a little unfair to Mr. Delors. Although we may disagree with Mr. Delors's recent proposals, I think that my hon. Friend pushes the point just a little too far.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I, from these Benches, endorse the plea for a debate on the Health Service, bearing in mind the response from the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who was unable to say that anyone had given an unreserved welcome to the Government's proposals?

Is there a possibility that in the near future there will be a statement or a debate on the armed services? I had understood that there might be one next week, but obviously one has not been arranged. Is there a possibility of our having such a debate in the near future, especially as—this is something that we in Northern Ireland have known for some time—undermanning in the armed forces, particularly the Army, stems not simply from a recruitment miscalculation but from the failure, over a number of years, to deploy forces at full strength?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister answered a question about the level of forces, and I recall that the position was not quite as the hon. Gentleman put it. He has asked me whether there will be a debate. Yes, there will be a debate in the not-too-distant future, and I hope that he will have an opportunity then to make his point at greater length.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): May I put it to my right hon. Friend that it is desirable that there should be a debate in this House on the reform of the legal services, if only to give a more balanced view than that conveyed by the debate in another place and by the inept behaviour of the judges?

Mr. Wakeham: There are two ways of looking at that. I would welcome a debate, particularly if we could have some level-headed contributions of the sort that my hon. Friend would make. I wish that I could find the time, but I do not think that I can just at the moment.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a number of district councils in the beautiful county of Nottinghamshire, including the county council and my own Ashfield district council, had a massive debate on mining subsidence in the county? A report has now been submitted which shows that hundreds and hundreds of properties are being severely damaged, yet British Coal is not prepared to accept responsibility. We have had discussions on that before in the House, but it is high time that we had a proper debate so that we can sort out the problem once and for all—it affects hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber—so that those who are getting an unfair deal get a fair deal. I am on my bended knees to the Leader of the House to do something about that.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is always very persuasive, but I have a suspicion that that matter is more properly directed to British Coal's management than to the House. There are occasions when mining matters are raised in the House. There is one next Tuesday, but it does

[Mr. Wakeham]

not seem wholly appropriate. I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman a debate, but I shall check that he is receiving proper answers to his letters from British Coal.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I do not know whether my right hon. Friend has ever had an office in 2 Abbey garden or 7 Old Palace yard, but if he has he will know that crossing Millbank is extremely dangerous. I have taken that matter up with the Department of Transport and Westminster city council. The Department of Transport says that Westminster city council is busy drawing up a scheme for Parliament square and Westminster city council says that in drawing up its scheme it is in consultation with the Department of Transport. Will my right hon. Friend do what he can to knock together a head from the Department of Transport and a head from Westminster city council to try to ensure that Members of Parliament and their staff going to and fro between the House and their offices can cross that lethal road in safety?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall look into the matter and see whether I can do anything to help, on condition that in the meantime my hon. Friend takes great care in crossing the road, because we do not want a by-election in his constituency.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): If the Leader of the House cannot persuade the Prime Minister to come to the House to defend her stubborn stupidity in ploughing on with the football identity card scheme, will he arrange for the Home Secretary to make an urgent statement next week explaining how the Taylor inquiry will be conducted? If the inquiry's interim report will be central to the Bill, as we understand it will, a statement from the Home Secretary would tell us whether Lord Justice Taylor knew of today's decision before he accepted the chairmanship of the inquiry, whether he intends to visit other football grounds where tragedies have taken place, including Bradford City, and whether he will make himself available to football supporters in many places throughout Britain and visit clubs in all divisions. It is important that all those points are made clear in a statement next week so that we know precisely how the inquiry will be conducted.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Leaving on one side for the moment his totally unjustified remarks about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he would be the first to complain if my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary came to the House and made a statement on how Lord Justice Taylor was to conduct his inquiry. Lord Justice Taylor will decide how to conduct his inquiry. He has been given terms of reference. I have no doubt that he will do an extremely good job and he does not need advice from the hon. Gentleman or anybody else. He will choose the method that he thinks is appropriate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Leader of the House aware of the great concern about the continuing destruction of the tropical rain forests around the world, in which contributory factors are the economic policies adopted by western Europe and the United States and the pressure put on countries with tropical rain forests by the World bank, the International Monetary Fund and the EC?

Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange a full debate about this subject and about the serious climatic changes caused by the destruction of the world's rain forests so that this country can make a contribution towards protecting the world's environment rather than contributing to its destruction?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is a serious problem which it would be appropriate for the House to debate. I do not accept his analysis of where the blame lies. The British Government, through the Overseas Development Administration, are doing their best to make a helpful contribution. I should like to arrange a debate, but I cannot promise one in the near future.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is the Leader of the House aware that a Roman site of great significance has been uncovered in Upper Thames street? It is said to be the site of a former Roman governor of London, Julius Agricola. Less than six weeks remain in which to survey the site, under present legislation, before it is destroyed for ever. Will the right hon. Gentleman accept from me that it is a site of great importance? Will he make representations to the Department of the Environment, because it appears that current legislation is woefully inadequate to enable sites such as this to be protected? Will he arrange for an early debate so that we may discuss the preservation of sites of archaeological interest?

Mr. Wakeham: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern that the remains of one of his distinguished predecessors, a governor of London, should be properly looked after and preserved. I recognise the serious point of his question and I shall refer it to those who can give him a better answer than I can.

Mr. Ashley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the Leader of the House to withdraw a comment that he made a short while ago? I asked for funds for the fine work of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the right hon. Gentleman replied accusing me of attacking the commission. He must have completely misunderstood my question. Will he withdraw his accusation?

Mr. Wakeham: I did not think I attacked the right hon. Gentleman in any way. Indeed, I thought I used words which were in support of the Equal Opportunities Commission. But I withdraw anything that I might have said inadvertently. The last thing I would wish to do is upset the right hon. Gentleman.

Points of Order

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps you can assist me and other Members in defining the difference between the answer to a quesion and a statement. This afternoon, in answer to a question from the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister took in excess of four minutes, in effect more than 25 per cent. of the time allotted to questions to the Prime Minister. If ordinary Members are to be given an opportunity to ask pertinent and relevant questions of the Prime Minister, it seems an abuse of the process of the House for the right hon. Lady in answering a question to take more than 25 per cent. of the time available.

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for whether statements are made and I had no request today for a

question on that matter. We reached question No. 6 today, which is about average for Prime Minister's Question Time.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it possible for you to extend injury time if the usual pattern of the House is abused so that Members wishing to put questions may have an opportunity to put them if a long time is taken, even by the Prime Minister, to answer a question?

Mr. Speaker: As I said, we reached question No. 6, which is about average for Prime Minister's Question Time. It is not unprecedented for fewer questions to be reached when a series of questions fom the Leader of the Opposition leads to long answers.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to my point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I will take next the point that I understand the Hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) wishes to raise with me.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You probably know that, for some months, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers have been refusing to answer letters from Members inquiring about entry clearance cases and other matters and that they have been referring them for reply to officials. Since this procedure began, I have been tabling large numbers of parliamentary questions about entry clearance matters, reunifying families and so on. I was alarmed recently to receive a reply from a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister to three such questions telling me:

"In accordance with the recent guidelines on the Handling of Representations by Members of Parliament in Immigration Cases, issued to Members on 14 December 1988, I have referred the question to the Correspondence Unit of Migration and Visa Department of the FCO. The hon. Member will receive a reply from them in due course."

Given that Ministers refuse to answer letters from right hon. and hon. Members, it is a bit much for them to refuse also to answer parliamentary questions but to refer them to officials—especially since those questions reveal a catalogue of incredible incompetence and bungling in the Foreign Office, the Home Office and the British embassy in Islamabad. I can well understand why Ministers do not want to answer such parliamentary questions, but can you, Mr. Speaker, persuade them to do so?

Mr. Speaker: I am often asked if I can bring pressure on the Government to alter answers or to give different answers, but that is not my function. However, I share the hon. Gentleman's concern.

Mr. Dobson: Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), Mr. Speaker. Recently, the Select Committee on Procedure reported on various aspects of disorder and misbehaviour in the House, and on right hon. and hon. Members who exploit opportunities that are open to them but which are in effect an abuse of the House. The Procedure Committee roundly denounced those practices—as you, Mr. Speaker, do, both in the House and when you give radio or television interviews. However, today we saw a clear abuse by the Prime Minister of her position in the House.

If we are to seek all-party support for upbraiding right hon. and hon. Members who wrongly exploit their position in the House, it must apply to all. Today, you could see from your seat, Mr. Speaker, as I could from mine, that the Prime Minister arrived armed with a two-page statement on the Football Spectators Bill, which she proceeded to read word for word. If that had been done by a junior Minister, you would have pulled that Minister up and called him or her to order.

Mr. Speaker: But today, the Prime Minister's response was to a question from the Leader of the Opposition. I cannot be held responsible for what was said in reply.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Reverting to your reply to my earlier point of order, I say with great respect that it is not the number of the question on the Order Paper reached that matters, but the total number of questions asked. When a statement is made or a very long answer given, surely it is within your powers, Mr. Speaker, to intervene——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I did intervene. I said, "This is Question Time."

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I can remember, as I am sure you can, when questions from the Leader of the Opposition seemed as though they lasted for as long as four minutes. Opposition Members did not complain then, so what is sauce for the gander is surely sauce for the goose.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I think that we had better get on.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We have a very heavy day ahead of us. Is it a fresh and helpful point of order?

Mr. Skinner: I believe that I know the reason why the Prime Minister speaks at length in that way. Her long-winded statements always occur on a Thursday. The clue lies in the fact that, on Thursdays, the Prime Minister meets the Cabinet and throws her weight about there. She does what she likes, making long-winded statements to which nobody replies. Then she comes to the House and forgets where she is.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Let us be fair about this. I do not raise many points of order, because you cannot see me from your place. When I put my question to the Leader of the House earlier, I thought from the expression on your face that you shared my concern. The Leader of the House said that there will be a mining debate next week. I know all about that debate. However, the right hon. Gentleman misled me in a way, because you, Mr. Speaker, know as well as I do that I shall be unable to raise the problem of subsidence in a debate about pit exits. The Leader of the House is not really being fair to me. I asked for help, and I have not received any. My right hon. Friend left me drowning in the pond.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman by suggesting that he tries an Adjournment debate.

BILL PRESENTED

HUMAN ORGAN TRANSPLANTS

Mr. Secretary Clarke, supported by Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Norman Lamont and Mr. Roger Freeman, presented a Bill to prohibit commercial dealings in human organs intended for transplanting; to restrict the transplanting of such organs between persons who are not genetically related; and for supplementary purposes connected with those matters: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 119.]

Private Bill Procedure

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

[Relevant document: Report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure (HC625 of Session 1987-88).]

4.24 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Anyone coming across private Bill procedure for the first time could be excused for wondering what this apparently arcane, complex procedure is all about and how it relates to public business. The fact that "Erskine May" devotes some 200 pages to explaining its intricacies only adds to the mystery and many may be put off from involving themselves further. I know, however, that this does not apply to the Joint Committee whose report is before the House. The complexities of the procedure, the fact that it is over 30 years since the topic was last examined and the wider implications of the whole subject—which are not always readily apparent—have not made this an easy task. But this is a really important report and it provides an admirable basis for our debate.

It may be helpful if I say how I propose to proceed. As I have said when various hon. Members have asked me to arrange this debate, I wish to hear the views of the House on the Joint Committee's report. But the House will wish to hear the Government's initial thinking. I have had the benefit of informal talks with a number of hon. Members and that has helped to clarify my thinking on this complex subject. I am not concerned with individual Bills, nor do I want to dwell on problems from the past. With the permission of the House I intend to speak briefly at the end of the debate, but I hope that hon. Members will understand if I do not respond in detail to all the points raised. The complexity of all this means that it is important to reflect very carefully before we introduce any changes.

Before proceeding further, I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) and the other members of the Joint Committee, including those from another place. My hon. Friend brings a unique set of qualities with him. We think of his clear vision, personal charm and long experience in the House. But, above all, he brings an immense knowledge to this subject, including the expertise developed in piloting—if that is the right metaphor—various British Rail Bills through the House.

The report begins with a quotation from "Erskine May":

> "Private legislation is legislation of a special kind for conferring particular powers or benefits on any person or body of persons . . . in excess of or in conflict with the general law."

I note that the Chairman of Ways and Means also used that quotation in his memorandum to the Joint Committee. In any consideration of private Bills and the procedure for their enactment, we should not lose sight of that. The fact that private Bills are for the interest or benefit of one or several persons, a group or some public or private body, means that they may also be to the detriment of others. But it is also clear what private Bills are not. They are not a means of giving any additional powers to the Government. Any Bill that included such provisions would be classified as a hybrid Bill and would be subject to a different procedure.

With that consideration in mind I wish to place on record my appreciation of the role of the Chairman of Ways and Means, the right hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Mr. Walker). I do not think the part played by the Chairman of Ways and Means in private Bills is always fully recognised. It includes supervision of private Bills in this House, appointing the various stages and finding time for opposed private business to be debated. All that has to be done in an impartial way, having regard to both promoters and petitioners, the effect on the time available for public business on the Floor of the House and—it goes without saying—without regard to personal, party or constituency interests. The House is fortunate that it can call on hon. Members such as the right hon. Gentleman who have had a vigorous life in party politics and who hold strong personal views on political questions, but who are able to set all that aside when it comes to filling the posts in our House that depend on utter integrity and impartiality. I know that the House would wish to pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for all that he does in his very distinguished office. I know that the House will understand why he is not with us for today's debate.

Turning to the Joint Committee's report, perhaps I can make two general points at the outset. First, I would repeat the point I made in my written evidence to the Joint Committee, that I welcome procedural streamlining which lessens the demand on Members but retains the essential rights and safeguards for promoters and petitioners. Secondly, on the whole, the existing arrangements have served us very well and we should not lightly contemplate major change, especially where the effect would be to remove or lessen parliamentary control.

The Joint Committee's report is a radical reappraisal of the whole place of private Bill procedure at the end of the 20th century. It challenges many assumptions in a refreshing and valuable way, and if its recommendations were implemented in full, the map of private Bill procedure would be largely redrawn. The report demands the most serious consideration, and the views of the House will be especially significant in that process.

The Joint Committee's recommendations can be conveniently split into four groups. Within those groups, some of the proposed changes could be brought about only by legislation and some only by amendments to Standing Orders, while others might be termed exhortations for a change or improvement in practice.

The first group of recommendations are of general application. They would reduce the range of private legislation by restricting it to matters that could not be handled in any other way, and by diverting matters that could be pursued by other means into those channels. That would apply where planning considerations were dominant and/or where the primary purpose of a private Bill could be achieved by other means.

We sympathise with the wish of the Joint Committee to impose greater discipline on promoters of private Bills, but I suggest that that should not be at the cost of constructing procedures that are too rigid. Every private Bill must contain an averment that the purposes of the Bill cannot be effected without the authority of Parliament. It has, I know, become customary for promoters to include in their Bills a range of measures—some of which require parliamentary authorisation and some of which do not—and thereby present a complete package to Parliament. I can well understand why that should be so: it could be cumbersome, expensive and time-consuming always to insist that two different processes should be complied with. Furthermore, if those different processes came to contradictory conclusions, the promoter might have to start again.

On the other hand, I am well aware of the view that promoters may use private Bills to avoid more expensive and time-consuming procedures, and I entirely agree with the Joint Committee that we should have no sympathy with promoters who simply "try it on". Committees take their duty seriously. The Committee on the recent Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill rejected the Bill, and I have no doubt that parliamentary agents are aware of the implication of that decision.

The Joint Committee also recommended that, when the primary purpose of a Bill can be authorised through other means, those means should be pursued first, leaving Parliament to deal only with the aspects that require parliamentary approval. That proposal marches alongside the recommendation that, where planning considerations are considered dominant, non-parliamentary procedures should be used. Again I see the thought that the Committee is pursuing in its recommendations, but some questions may need to be thought about. Simply deciding the "primary purpose" and determining the "dominant" features may, for example, be matters of subjective judgment, open to dispute and liable to create further delays.

Although action has been taken to speed up inquiry handling times, it remains true that, for a major proposal, non-parliamentary procedures—involving the holding of a public inquiry by an inspector, the preparation of a report and the consideration by Ministers of his decision—can be a very time-consuming process, by contrast with private Bills with similar subject matter. A two-stage process, in which a non-parliamentary inquiry into the "primary purpose" was followed by a private Bill on the secondary aspects, even if it could be made to run smoothly, would inevitably be a long-drawn-out and expensive process. To limit Parliament's consideration to secondary issues could also prove an unacceptable fetter if there were serious doubts within Parliament about the merits of the proposal in principle.

Under the Joint Committee's proposal Parliament would be expected to confine its debate to the narrow subject matter of a Bill, and to abstain from addressing itself to the wider issues already decided by non-parliamentary procedures. While I am sure that this scheme could work well in a number of cases, I cannot help asking myself what might happen if the measure in question were a controversial one. Would hon. Members really keep their own counsel if they had strong views and had been given no earlier chance to express them?

The second batch of recommendations, as I have grouped them, would also include a reduction in the scope of private legislation by the introduction in new primary legislation of ministerial order-making powers in respect of various matters relating to railways, trams, highways and harbours to replace the private Bill procedure.

At present, the private Bill procedure is the only way of giving statutory powers for the construction and operation of railway lines of any kind, including trams. If order-making powers on railways were given to the Secretary of State, Parliament would lose its say. The recommendation that railway work should be authorised by an order-making process would require primary legislation. Such a Bill would need to cover not only new

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order-making powers for British Rail and London Regional Transport Bills but the modernisation of 19th century legislation to deal satisfactorily with the increasing number of light rapid transit schemes that are expected to come forward over the next few years. Consultations would be necessary with the local authority associations on whether local authorities should be empowered to deal with some of the matters now dealt with in private Bills. Other interests, including the operators, would also have to be consulted.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be willing further to consult those concerned if these proposals for legislative change have the clear support of the House. This would, however, be very major and complex legislation and we would need to be satisfied in detail that the alternative arrangements would represent an improvement. Private Bill procedure is, after all, a tried and tested way of dealing with schemes.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): What concerns me at the moment is that I am not altogether sure if the Lord President is just rehearsing the arguments for and against. Will he be giving us a clear indication of the Government's intentions and attitudes rather than giving us the argument on the one hand and the counter-argument on the other? He must know that, if this is to be a 'take note' debate for the Government, the report has been out since October 1988 and this debate could have taken place, as some of us urged, much earlier. The Lord President is making interesting points. Wherever possible, will he indicate firm Government support for or opposition to the various recommendations?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman must just listen to my speech and form his own conclusions at the end. On the first batch of recommendations that I mentioned, what I said was, I thought, clear and precise and to the point. I said that the Government had some reservations about them. If, however, it were the clear view of the House that we should proceed, the Government would seek to consult all the outside people who have a major say or whose views are important and who would need to be consulted before we decided to bring forward extremely complex legislation.

That is a perfectly reasonable point of view to adopt. The hon. Gentleman will have the chance to make his own speech in his own way if, Madam Deputy Speaker, he catches your eye, but I should have thought that a perfectly reasonable view for Government to take in a debate on the Adjournment at this stage.

Recommendation 7 addresses the procedures for stopping up highways. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is already considering proposals to amend section 116 of the Highways Act 1980 which governs the procedures for stopping up all-purpose highways. The proposal also affects the stopping up of footpaths and bridleways under section 118 of the 1980 Act and he will be consulting my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on that. I am glad to say that, provided all goes well, we should be able to accept this recommendation, but it will have to await a suitable legislative opportunity.

Recommendation 9 proposes that the purposes for which harbours orders may be made under the Harbours Act 1964 should be broadened and that section 62, which allows powers to be obtained either by order or by private Bill, should be repealed. Clearly, this would require primary legislation and, as with railways, we need to be sure that new arrangements will work. My right hon. Friend will be willing to undertake appropriate consultations if the House generally favours that change.

If I could take stock at this point, the first and second groups of the Joint Committee's recommendations, taken together, would sweep out a large proportion of what currently comes before the House as major private business and direct it into routes outside Parliament. That would undoubtedly have some advantages, but the business so displaced from the House would almost certainly proceed at a slower pace. I have mentioned a number of points where I think that the practical working of the Joint Committee's scheme might bear further thought and I have also made it clear that my right hon. Friends will be prepared to consult in greater depth if that reflects the wish of the House. I hope that the House will agree that this is a constructive and sensible approach to a very far-reaching set of proposals.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): One of the strongest recommendations for removing Bills from the private Bill procedure concerned local government Bills. The spate of jumbo Bills that we have considered has more or less come to an end, unless there is to be another reform of local government, but, even then, there may be nothing like the number of Bills that we have had to consider in the past.

Would this not be a good opportunity to remove the vast majority of local government Bills from the private Bill procedure and ensure that in future primary Government legislation enables local authorities to do various things? Surely that would be better than the use of the private Bill procedure. It was absolutely crazy that, in the case of the west midlands, Merseyside and Humberside, we had to debate the hours that take-away shops could be open, as well as massage parlours and processions. What was needed was national enabling legislation.

Mr. Wakeham: I see the force of the hon. Gentleman's point, and I shall listen with interest to what he has to say.

I have referred to our general approach to the matter. Before I leave that part of the report, however, I should like to emphasise the value and the importance of the private Bill procedure, both to the promoter and to the petitioner. It imposes a discipline on promoters, but offers them a reasonable degree of certainty and a fairly predictable timetable. It gives petitioners, both public bodies and individuals, the opportunity of a fair and sympathetic hearing befor a Committee of this House and of another place. I am aware of the care and trouble Private Bill Committees take to ensure that this is so. Any Member can raise the case of an individual on the Floor of the House as the Bill proceeds. Not least, it ensures that the eventual decision is taken by Parliament.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr. Wakeham: I think that I ought to make a little progress. Every hon. Member will have an opportunity to make his contribution.

Mr. Smith: Could I ask the Leader of the House a question about that specific point?

Mr. Wakeham: Very well.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the Leader of the House. I do not wish to interrupt his flow, but he suggested that in his view the private Bill procedure gave a fair crack of the whip to petitioners against a Bill. That is certainly not the experience of my constituents who are seeking to petition against British Rail's proposals for King's Cross. They find that the procedure for making their democratic voice heard is arcane, difficult, expensive and extremely frustrating.

Mr. Wakeham: That is typical of the way that we should not proceed. I was talking about the experience of the past 30 years or so. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is currently engaged in a matter which concerns his constituents. He is saying various things that are certainly the subject of considerable argument. In my experience of these matters, by and large petitioners have had a pretty reasonable crack of the whip. I recognise that the hon. Gentleman may not agree, but I shall make my speech in my own way and then I shall listen to him.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Does the Leader of the House agree that the general burden of evidence to the Joint Committee, whose report we are considering, from individuals and organisations who have petitioned in the past, was that, roughly speaking, they found the procedure to be as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)? That is why they would prefer public local inquiries.

Mr. Wakeham: I quite understand that the people who want a change in the procedure give evidence to committees and those who are satisfied with the procedure are probably not so moved to give evidence. That does not mean that those who give evidence are wrong and those who are quitely acquiescent to the system are right. Parliament has to take a balanced view, listen to the arguments and reach a conclusion. I am perfectly entitled to put my view that, over the years, by and large, petitioners receive a fair hearing before Parliament. It is not a procedure which I would abandon lightly without being sure that the alternative would be better, and I consider that to be a reasonable view.

The third group of recommendations deals with matters of detail and procedure, and I can say at the outset that we support very many of those proposals. There are, however, some proposals on which we would wish to express doubt or qualification, and it may help if I set them out now.

On recommendation 10 I must make it clear that the relevant Government Departments keep the case for public local authority legislation under regular review and look for the opportunity to introduce miscellaneous provisions Bills as the need arises and as opportunity permits. But such Bills have to compete for a place in the legislative programme and their very nature means that they are susceptible to amendment and thereby take up valuable time on the Floor of the House.

On recommendation 16 the Government agree that a private Bill should normally be expected to complete its progress within one Session, or two at most, but we should be reluctant to see the incorporation of any formal restriction to this effect in Standing Orders, and we are glad to note that the Committee took a similar view. There may be sound reasons for a carry over beyond two Sessions and, if I may say so, bodies which promote a Bill before Parliament—and pay for it—are entitled to expect a decision provided that they themselves have not been unduly dilatory or obdurate.

A further aspect of the carry-over procedure is the proposal in recommendation 18 that Bills should be carried over a Dissolution not by means of a portmanteau resolution in the dying Parliament, but by revival motions, moved separately for each Bill, in the new Parliament. That could, however, lead to the possibility of an extra Second Reading-type debate on every carried-over Bill, and I cannot help wondering whether that would be an effective use of our time.

There are three recommendations—Nos. 20 to 22—relating to the blocking of Bills. I can see the argument for the recommendation that an hon. Member should be required to give reasons for opposition, but there may be practical difficulties. If hon. Members were obliged to give reasons, the Chair might be required to make some difficult judgments about the sufficiency of the reasons advanced, in order to prevent such motions from degenerating either into a standard all-embracing formula or a precis of a Second Reading speech.

We also have doubts about the proposals to abolish the procedure for oral objection and to require a Member to obtain the support of at least five other Members in blocking a private Bill. Would it really be fair to restrict in these ways a single Member who wished, for example, to raise a genuine constituency point?

In recommendations 50 to 52 the Joint Committee also proposed in respect of special procedures orders that if a petition of general objection is referred to a Joint Committee, and the Joint Committee finds in favour of the petitioners, the Government ought not to overrule the Committee by means of a confirmation Bill. I think that the constitutional position here is rather more complex than the recommendation implies. I have no doubt that the House would always want to pay particular attention to the report of a Joint Committee, but ultimately it must be for Parliament itself to take the decision.

If I have dwelt on those detailed procedural recommendations about which we have reservations, I am sure that hon. Members will understand that I have done so because I felt it right to explain our reasoning in view of the time and effort which the Joint Committee devoted to its consideration.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): As my right hon. Friend has identified the recommendations under House of Commons procedures with which he is not happy, do I take it that he is content with the rest?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend interrupts me as I am proceeding with my speech. I know that it is very exciting, but if he can contain himself I shall do my best to explain about the others. My next sentence begins, "For the rest".

For the rest, we are broadly content with the remainder of recommendations 11 to 39 affecting England and Wales, and would be happy to leave them to the decision of the House. That means that we would, of course, accept the various recommendations which suggest improvements to, or encourage the development of, current Committee

[Mr. Wakeham]

practice, the proposed simplification of the arrangements for fees and the suggested amendment to Standing Orders to allow remaining stages to be taken immediately after a debate on consideration.

In view of current interest in environmental matters I should particularly like to say a few words about recommendation 13, which is that the House should incorporate environmental impact assessment into private Bill procedure. As with many of the Committee's other procedural recommendations, it will be for the House to decide whether to amend Standing Orders as proposed by the Committee. But in this case the Committee envisages procedures under which the Department of the Environment and other Departments would determine whether environmental assessment is, in fact, necessary and would later report on the environmental statements which promoters would be required to submit to Parliament.

Requirements for environmental assessments have already been introduced for projects that are approved under statutory procedures to comply with the European directive on environmental assessment. The directive does not apply to projects approved by specific Acts of national legislation, which include private and hybrid Bills. However, the Government have said that they will ensure that for Bills that they promote, relating to projects to which the directive would otherwise apply, such assessments are undertaken. We are therefore in favour of the concept of environmental assessment in appropriate cases and we support the Joint Committee's recommendation. In particular, we are willing for Government Departments to undertake the functions envisaged for them in that recommendation. We are therefore ready to consult about the way in which those aspects of the recommendation that would affect procedures outside Parliament can best be implemented.

The fourth group of recommendations deals with private legislation procedure in Scotland. The practical difficulties involved in implementing the Joint Committee's proposals to limit the range of private legislation apply as much to Scotland as they do to England and Wales. The burden that private legislation procedure imposes on Members is usually much less than for Bills relating to England and Wales, and actual working experience is that the distinctive Scottish inquiry procedure gives opportunity to objectors to put their case. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State believes that there is no strong case for change in Scotland but he will study closely any views expressed by Scottish Members.

The detailed Scottish procedural points—recommendations 41 to 49—are largely acceptable. The proposal to set a 12-month time limit is acceptable as the expected norm, but we would not wish to formalise that by amending the relevant legislation. The spirit of the recommendation can be implemented without legislation. The proposal that a confirmation Bill should be referred to a Joint Committee only where there are grounds for believing that the inquiry by commissions was inadequate is acceptable, but it would require legislation, and we shall have to wait for a suitable opportunity.

In concluding, I emphasise again my wish to hear the views of the House. This is an important and far-reaching report which recommends major changes in the range of private legislation. I have set out some practical difficulties in some of the recommendations, the advantages of the present system and the flexibility that it allows. In particular, the private Bill procedure should not be sold short in any comparison with non-parliamentary procedures. I have indicated that many matters of detail and procedure will have our support, if they are acceptable to the House, and I have explained some of those on which we have reservations. I should add that, if there were general and wide-ranging agreement on a number of the detailed procedural recommendations, I should be glad to see what could be done to implement them in time for the next Session.

4.55 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Before getting involved in the intricacies of the Joint Committee's proposals for changes in the way that both Houses of Parliament should deal with private Bills, I should pay tribute to a number of people. The first, Madam Deputy Speaker, is my and your right hon. Friend, the Chairman of Ways and Means, who rightly decided, after years of growing dissatisfaction among Members of both Houses, and also among many people involved in promoting or in trying to obstruct the promotion of private Bills, that something should be done and that the time was ripe for a full review of the procedures. The right hon. Gentleman is to be congratulated on grasping the nettle.

Next to be congratulated are those valiant seekers after truth, the seven hon. Members of this House and the seven Peers who served on the Joint Committee, which met on over 30 occasions and heard a vast amount of detailed evidence on extremely complex matters. Above all, we should pay tribute, as has already been done, to the hon. Member for the New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) who chaired every one of those sessions. Stakhanovite tendencies, which are probably still looked on with favour even in the perestroika version of the Soviet Union and here, are shown by people who do that amount of work on our behalf. Everyone owes them a debt of gratitude for all the work that they have done.

I also pay tribute to the members of the Joint Committee for the report, although that tribute should more properly go to the clerks who drafted the report. It is not a long report. I thought that I could browse through it on a train journey and get its general drift, but at the end of the 56 pages I found that I needed to go back to page 1 to find out what page 56 was about. It is an extremely concise, well written document. The only trouble is that all its concepts and complexities are of high density. It is an excellent report but it is hard going. Our method of dealing with private Bills is complex and consideration of ways to change those procedures is even more complex and demanding, but the Committee tried to do that job.

Having paid those tributes, I think that I should set out what I see as the principles and the practical considerations that might best guide our response to an excellent report and also colour our view of private Bills in general, now and in the future. I am not a lawyer, but we hear a lot about the rule of law. A basic concept of the rule of law is that all laws should apply to everybody, that we should all be equal before the law, that the obligations of the law should fall on everyone and that the protection of the law should be available to everyone. One book that I

consulted on this matter gave another interpretation of the concept of the rule of law—that all should be treated alike and that

"unfair discrimination must not be sanctioned by law"

because that in itself would be contrary to the rule of law.

The general nature of our laws in this country is exemplified by the fact that most are to be found in what are classified as public general Acts whereas private Bills, seek to confer on individuals or organisatons powers that are over and above those that are available to individuals or other organisations. In some cases, for the benefit of the promoters, a Bill takes away the protection that Parliament has given people through a public general Act or even that the common law has provided. At one and the same time a private Bill can bestow benefits on those promoting it while taking from other people the legal protection that they previously enjoyed. We must bear that in mind when we are considering the concept of private legislation.

A further objection to private Bills is that some promoters have resorted to using them to take from people who object to what they are proposing the rights that Parliament has given to those objectors to challenge such proposals at a public local inquiry. Nearly everybody who has had to go through the business of being a petitioner against a private Bill regards the forum of a public local inquiry as infinitely superior in almost every way to having to petition against private Bills.

Private Bills are relatively cheaper for promoters but they are relatively more expensive for those who wish to object. On the other hand, while a public local inquiry may be expensive for the promoters who must be present all the time, a public local inquiry gives the objector whose objections may be fairly limited the opportunity to make his objections and then disappear. In addition, as many public local inquiries are, indeed, local, people in Northumberland or in Wales do not have to traipse down to London, or get someone else to traipse down to London, just to register their objections. There are many ways in which ordinary people regard public local inquiries as superior to the idea of having to petition against a private Bill.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): While I support my hon Friend's thesis in general, does he agree that it presupposes that there is adequate planning machinery, especially strategic planning machinery in the area of any project? However, does he also agree, in contravention of what the Leader of the House said, that one of the problems of private Bill procedure in the House is that the locus standi in terms of parliamentary procedure is almost certainly narrower than any inspector would impose at a local inquiry, which tends to be wide-ranging and seeks to be very fair?

Mr. Dobson: I agree with all my hon. Friend's points. I was disturbed at Prime Minister's Question Time today when I heard the Prime Minister say, in response to a question about the railway lines from the Kent coast to London to facilitate the establishment and running of the Channel tunnel, that she would not accept that the private Bill procedure

"is inferior to a public inquiry."

I feel fairly confident that nearly everyone in Kent, in Dulwich, in Peckham or even in my area of King's Cross who wants to object would prefer a public inquiry to being given the wondrous opportunity to petition against a Bill promoted by British Rail.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Leaving aside the issue of the Kent railway lines, to which I might refer later if I catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, while I agree with what the hon. Gentleman has just said—basically, that is what we tried to say in the report—before he exaggerates the point, and because the private Bill procedure will face prospective petitioners for a long time to come, does he agree that there are compensating advantages in the private Bill procedure in that prospective petitioners or opponents might stand a better chance before a Committee of four hon. Members of this House, who might be quite sympathetic, than they would before one planning inspector who would report back to a Secretary of State?

Mr. Dobson: Yes, that is true, especially if the inspector would be reporting back to the current Secretaries of State. I can see all sorts of disadvantages in that respect.

Nevertheless, while it might be all right for us to say to petitioners, "You would be better off petitioning," it would be difficult for us to gainsay them if they decided that they would be better off with a public inquiry. In the evidence that was presented to the Joint Committee, it was noticeable that the bulk of those organisations that gave evidence and that were involved in opposing more than one private Bill tended to say that they would infinitely prefer a public local inquiry. Indeed, the first sentence of paragraph 38 of the excellent report states:

"The defenders of private Bill procedure were in the main promoters."

I believe that it was Lenin who said that to some extent one can judge people by their friends. The friends of the private Bill procedure are, in the main, promoters.

We have found recently that at one and the same time a private Bill promoter, who may be seeking to take some protection away from a local community—for example, its right to bring actions for nuisance, a protection which the law has given to the people living there just as it has given it to people living everywhere—is, by using the private Bill procedure, taking away from people their right to be heard in the forum of their choice where they can object to the process of losing their long-term rights. Some of the more objectionable of the more recent private Bills have been objectionable in both their long-term and short-term effects by means of the very use of the private Bill procedure.

I can do nothing other than repeat that there seems little doubt that up to now the private Bill procedure has favoured promoters and disadvantaged petitioners. In my view, Parliament should be much more reluctant than it has been in the past to allow organisations to use private Bills to set aside the law, for that is what private Bills do.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): In the context of those remarks, does my hon. Friend accept—I am not making this point in a purely partisan sense—that in recent years the considerable extent of privatisation, coupled with a number of Bills giving private businesses the rights compulsorily to purchase or to enter private property, has enormously extended the power and the influence of private businesses and that this House should therefore be careful before it allows that practice to be further extended?

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend, who has had considerable involvement in opposing several private Bills, makes a valid point. Indeed, my next point follows on almost directly from what my hon. Friend has said. The fact that the promoters of private Bills are nearly always wealthy and powerful organisations, whether in the public or the private sector, makes unnecessary resort to private Bills all the more objectionable. In this Parliament we have been running, in effect, a system in which wealthy and powerful organisations have bought themselves benefits that are not available to most people. They buy those benefits by virtue of having money and access to our procedures. In some cases, they have contrived to use the private Bill procedure to secure, quite literally, one law for the rich—that is, for the rich organisation promoting the Bill.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: In some cases, statutory companies do not have the option of going to local planning inquiries, but their statutory obligations require them to come to the House. Would the hon. Gentleman be in favour of seeking to repeal all the requirements upon statutory companies to come to the House?

Mr. Dobson I shall deal with that later. If I do not do so, I shall be happy for the hon. Gentleman to remind me.

Those privileged organisations, by using the private Bill procedure, impose substantial costs upon the public purse. It is all right for the hon. Gentleman to say that, when people promote their Bill, they have paid their money and they are entitled to some degree of certainty, but they have not paid the full costs. One of the report's proposals is that the costs that the promoters impose on the public purse should in future be fully recovered from them.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend recognise also that those promoters impose, in a sense, considerable costs on hon. Members of the House? I know that two of my hon. Friends, who are present today, have sat on Bills and have invested a tremendous amount of time in those Bills, perhaps to the disadvantage of their constituents and other political issues.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend, with his impeccable logic, has almost enunciated my next sentence. I believe that in many ways the most weighty practical reason for trying to curtail the unnecessary use of the private Bill procedure is that those who seek privileges by private legislation impose enormous demands on the time of Members of the House. I remind all my fellow parliamentarians that we serve in the Parliament which, of all Parliaments in the democratic world, already sits for the greatest number of days in a year, for the longest hours and to a preposterous parliamentary calendar, originally decided upon in Victorian times. Compared with practically every other legislature in the world, we are already overdoing it. However, despite those long hours and the large number of days that we work in a year—as the Leader of the House knows to his cost every Thursday —we do not find time to debate all the topics that we, as Members, think should take priority.

By the existence of the private Bill procedure and by us not having a rigorous attitude towards those who wish to use it, we allow ourselves to be forced to find time to debate and legislate, not the priorities that we have laid down, but a series of priorities determined by the private interests of outside organisations.

For all those reasons—both of principles and of practice—we should take a much more rigorous attitude to would-be promoters of private Bills. They should have to prove the need for what they propose. They should have to prove that what they propose is not just in their interests, but in the interests of the general public. If it is just in their interests and they cannot find a law to allow them to do it —tough.

At the outset, even if it is in the public interest, promoters should also have to prove that what they need cannot be achieved by other means, however expensive and inconvenient to them those other means might be. I welcome the report of the Joint Committee because, as I understand it, it proposes just such a robust approach to those who want to promote private Bills. I say "as I understand it" advisedly because, although I have studied the report carefully and I have discussed it with people who understand these matters far better than I do, I would not claim that I have mastered all its intricacies. Not only do I acknowledge the tenuousness of my grasp of some of the report, but I am doubtful of the grasp of many other right hon. and hon. Members. My experience in the House is that, if someone says that he understands a procedure, he is the last person to ask for advice on that procedure. That is why I always go to the Clerks.

As the Leader of the House has said, the nub of the Committee's approach lies in its recommendations that a promoter should be required to prove that private legislation is necessary to secure the primary purpose of the Bill and that, where that primary purpose can be secured by other means, Parliament should either not be involved at all or should be asked only to deal with any aspects that specifically require the authority of Parliament. In other words, what happens in future should not be what has happened in the past, where some minor need for parliamentary approval has been used as a stalking horse by the promoters to avoid a local planning inquiry into the primary purpose of their project. That is a most welcome proposal.

My notes, which I wrote before I heard the Leader of the House speak, say, "I cannot see how it could be resisted by anyone." However, I now discover that that aspect of the proposals is resisted by the Leader of the House, partly on the ground, apparently, that we might have great difficulty in deciding the primary purpose of a piece of legislation. That is from a Government who have introduced an immigration law that says that a person marrying someone from abroad has to prove the primary purpose of the marriage.I suggest to anyone with any experience of this world that trying to prove the primary purpose of a marriage is much more difficult than trying to discern the primary purpose of a private Bill.

I believe that, if we set our minds to defining the primary purpose of a Bill, we should not find it very difficult. I hope that we will not see strenuous Government resistance to that aspect of the proposals. If there is strenuous resistance, it will be strenuous Government resistance to the nub of the proposals, as I understand them.

The Committee goes further than that and recommends that, in certain circumstances, where planning considerations are accepted by everyone to be dominant—but there are works which at the moment would require resort to the House—even the works could be dealt with by

non-parliamentary procedures, where necessary involving public local inquiries. That appears to be a sound approach, too.

Much of the history of what might be described as the modern private Bill procedure is dominated by the need for legislative protection for railway promoters and builders against common law actions for nuisance. Railway works are still the single most common reason for seeking to promote a private Bill. I shall leave it to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) to deal with our joint interest in British Rail's deplorable and ludicrous proposals to build Britain's premier Euro-station in a vast, gloomy and horrible cavern underneath the mainline station at King's Cross. Even my minor involvement in helping some of the objectors to the proposals—who have therefore become petitioners—suggests that our present procedure is not a sound way of going about things. People feel much more excluded and much more mystified by the private Bill process than they do by public local inquiries.

The Joint Committee proposed to change the procedure for railway works to bring them roughly in line with the proposal for road works, in that the promoter of the railway works would draft an order and consult locally about it. The promoter would then submit the draft order to the relevant Secretary of State, who could make, modify or reject the order only after a public local inquiry into any valid objections. On balance, that is probably a good idea. However, we must accept that that means that the promoter of a railway, having secured Government support for it, if there is any parliamentary trouble, is likely to secure the payroll vote—and have everyone else voting for it, too—should that prove to be necessary. For major railway schemes, that may, in some senses, be for the best.

If the Government support the Euroline from Dover to London, it would be far better if they made their genuine support clear. In that case they could back the scheme rather than stand behind a door poking sticks and offering buns to the people from British Rail. Currently the Government appear to be urging British Rail to get on with it while ensuring that the Government do not take any of the blame. If we support the concept of reasonable and sensible government, it would be far better for such a Government to say that they believe the project to be right. People would then know exactly with whom they were dealing and on whom they should bring pressure to bear.

The current situation is neither fish, flesh nor fowl. No one is clear about whether the Government are behind the proposed link or about whether British Rail would dare go ahead with it unless they had Government support. I shall not go into all the private letters sent and so on at this time. In general, if the Government support a specific major, local project, it would be better for them to declare that support and to take responsibility, political and otherwise, for it.

Mr. Spearing: I hesitate to intervene, but this is an important point. My hon. Friend may have misunderstood one of the report's recommendations. If we follow paragraph 47 of the report, which deals with the sixth recommendation, does it not mean that, after the planning inquiry on a certain project, it would then go to the Secretary of State of the day who would decide on it? That means that the project would not come to Parliament. Despite the merits of what my hon. Friend has said about the current unsatisfactory situation, would he like to leave the decision entirely to the Government of the day?

Mr. Dobson: I believe that important orders that cover substantial geographical areas and so on should be subject to the decision of the House. If we get away from the private Bill procedure and move towards the procedure operating orders we must accept that, once the Government have endorsed a project, it is likely to go through. Anyone in favour of adopting the order procedure must accept the logical conclusion that a project is then more likely to go through than if it had been subject to the private Bill procedure. That may be unfortunate and perhaps it is one reason for rejecting the proposition.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): As far as I know, British Rail has never failed to get a Bill accepted even under the present procedure. To many of us that explains why British Rail presents its proposals in such an arrogant and sub-standard fashion. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, currently, we have the worst of all worlds because a Bill is scrutinised by people who, by definition, know as little as possible about the locality affected? Despite everything, they have little effective opportunity to prevent such a Bill from going through the House.

Mr. Dobson: I apologise if I have not made it clear that that is my view.

Those who would prefer the cleaner order approach must accept that, if an order manages to get the approval of a Secretary of State, the chances are that it will get parliamentary support, even if we insert another parliamentary stage into that order. In general, Secretaries of State can reckon on getting things through the House except in odd circumstances. I know that there are examples when that does not happen, but the odds are usually in the Government's favour. At the moment, I wish that they were not.

The Joint Committee also recommends that the order approach be applied to tramways and perhaps to the light transit outfits which want to shove railways down the roads. It believes that the orders presently permitted under the Harbours Act 1964 should be extended to cover a wider range of developments. Therefore, the railway order principle would be applied to other spheres.

The Leader of the House has already pointed out that all the proposals require primary legislation. We believe that if they are acceptable, in principle, to the House, the Government should undertake to introduce the legislation in time for the beginning of the next parliamentary Session.

Mr. Wakeham: Does the hon. Gentleman consider that we should have consultations with local authorities before we do that?

Mr. Dobson: It would be sound for the Government to consult local authorities and others. The Government, however, may be rather picky and choosy about whom they consult. The right hon. Gentleman was happy to leap to the Dispatch Box and support the abolition of the dock labour scheme without any consultation with the 9,000 people affected. I do not believe that the right hon. Gentleman should issue such cries about consultation at the moment.

Providing the Opposition find the measures, as drafted, acceptable, we would not wish to obstruct them if that is

[Mr. Dobson]

the general will of the House. We cannot give carte blanche to the legislation, however, because we never know what the parliamentary draftsmen will come up with. Even when they have been working on something of which I have approved, some of the things drafted have been nonsense. Therefore, we could not let everything go through on the nod.

As there has been so much concern about private Bills, it would not be acceptable for us to make minor amendments to our Standing Orders without changing the primary legislation quickly. That change is necessary if the meat of the Committee's proposals is to go through.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I believe that, unless the Government are prepared to look at the whole package, the changes to our Standing Orders are unacceptable. My concern is shared by many groups outside the House. At the moment the whole procedure is weighted in favour of the promoters, but the safeguards in our Standing Orders slow the promoters down slightly. It would be unacceptable to do away with many of the safeguards in the Standing Orders without an absolute guarantee that matters concerning the environment would be subject to a planning inquiry first and subject to the other changes proposed.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Currently we have a system of checks and balances—the checks are not substantial and the procedure is rather unbalanced. However, any changes to our procedures would obviously upset that system, especially if the major proposals that require primary legislation do not go through the House.

The Leader of the House has proposed that we should make our own changes, but that we should not start to try to change the law. I am sure that that would be unacceptable to many people who are especially interested in this topic.

I do not want to dwell on the procedural changes at great length. There are many and those that are important to the House impinge upon the rights of Back Benchers who are faced with a private Bill affecting their constituencies or some organisation of great interest to them. We must bear in mind the needs and rights of Back Benchers in this matter. I want to listen to the views of other hon. Members about procedural changes. We should not accept any streamlining procedural changes which would deprive an individual Member, who is concerned about something which affects his or her constituency, of the right to block and, by blocking, gain concessions. That is a vital part of the present procedure which should not be lost.

However, I most strongly support the proposal that the new procedures should require the submission of environmental impact assessments in all cases where they are relevant. I am very happy to welcome whole-heartedly the undertakings given by the Leader of the House about Government support for that. I am also keen that, provided Scottish Members want it, that provision should apply to the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936 orders, as that would provide in Scotland as well as in England and Wales better information and protection for people affected by the works for which authorisation is sought. Subject to the views of Scottish Members, who will be more familiar with their procedures than most of us, the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure is on the right lines when it recommends for Scotland the additional protections for the public and petitioners which are recommended elsewhere in the report.

There is only one item about which I take an entirely different view from that taken by the Joint Committee, partly because it has been drawn to my attention by the Ramblers Association. I have doubts about recommendation (7) which states:

"The Highways Act 1980 should be extended so as to permit stopping-up orders"

for rights of way

"to be made on safety grounds in appropriate cases".

British Rail advocated that to the Committee on the ground that the use of high-speed trains made paths across railway lines increasingly dangerous.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Would my hon. Friend like to comment on the fact that in my constituency British Rail has not protected a waist-high bridge on which there has already been one serious accident involving a child? Would it not be more incumbent on British Rail to do something about that kind of problem instead before it worries about the effects of high-speed trains?

Mr. Dobson: I am in favour of British Rail trying to make everything safe, and I have sympathy with its desire to make things safe. It is not the walker who makes the situation dangerous; British Rail does that with its high-speed trains. Instead of stopping up a footpath which has traditionally crossed a railway line, British Rail should build a bridge or dig a little tunnel under the line for people to use. It would not be right to close those paths on the ground that British Rail was making them more dangerous. Those who make things dangerous are obliged to remove the dangers, not to remove the privileges and rights which people have hitherto enjoyed.

I very much welcome the report, although I was a trifle disappointed by what is apparently the Government's response as enunciated by the Leader of the House. The Leader of the House said that he is here to listen to hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that he will do that. This report was the unanimous product of a very diverse group of people. It may not receive the unanimous support of hon. Members of this House, but its approach will receive considerable cross-party support. I hope, therefore, that the report will be acceptable, subject to a few caveats, and that the Government will get on with facilitating the changes which the Joint Committee unanimously believes are necessary and urgent. I commend the efforts of those who served on the Committee and who have done such a fine job.

5.34 pm

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for the welcome which he broadly gave to the report and for the kind remarks that he made about me. I also appreciated the way in which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) received the report from the Opposition Front Bench.

It is now nearly three years since, by resolution, the House indicated its decision to establish a Joint Select Committee and it is now more than two years since the Committee, of which I had the honour to be Chairman,

started its work. At the outset, I want to thank everyone who served on the Committee for their tireless work. Sadly, two Committee members—Mr. McQuarrie and Mr. Weetch—were not returned at the last general election. I want particularly, on their behalf, to thank the two Committee Clerks, Miss Baker and Mr. Makower, without whom, frankly, the report would not have seen the light of day. We are greatly in their debt. In passing I associate with those remarks Dr. Malcolm Grant and Mr. Ralegh Hancock, who were advisers to the Committee.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House explained, there have been other attempts to reform private Bill procedure. The two most notable, and the two which have occurred in the lifetime of most hon. Members, were the Committees in 1930 chaired by Mr. Dunnico and that in 1955 chaired by Mr. Glenvil Hall.

Without in any way detracting from the work of those Committees, their terms of reference were rather more limited than the terms of reference given to us, which were extremely wide. I congratulate and thank in his absence the right hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Mr. Walker), the Chairman of Ways and Means, who insisted from the outset that the report should provide a wide and thorough examinination.

In this Session of Parliament, there are more than twice as many private Bills as public Bills—58 as opposed to only 28. Even if we include the nine private Member's Bills on the assumption that they are public Bills, there is a marked preponderance of private Bills. Each of those private Bills on average costs the taxpayer £10,000. Therefore, nearly £1 million is provided to allow promoters, who are often extremely wealthy organisations, the privilege of coming to Parliament and, as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said, to use hon. Members' time.

This is a big legislative business. It involves hon. Members in long periods of attendance in Committees which are quite unlike Standing Committees, where pairs can be arranged. More importantly, this costs a great deal of money. I was somewhat alarmed when the Society of Parliamentary Agents suggested during our deliberations that raising the figure to what we would now consider a reasonable figure—in other words to recover the £10,000 per Bill which the Bills cost—would somehow put off those who had a legitimate reason for introducing legislation, since we then discovered that on the society's estimate of the costs, an unopposed Bill would cost the promoter £20,000, and an opposed Bill would cost £36,000. So I have a feeling that we may be more or less right. I certainly believe that Parliament must stop providing a voluntary service for organisations that can well look after themselves.

As my right hon. Friend pointed out, the recommendations fall into four separate categories. There are a lot of them—I make no excuse for that. Indeed, there are over 60. This debate will give hon. Members an opportunity to express views on all or some of them. I want to make it crystal clear that, although there are many recommendations, and although they cover various functions, they hang together as a package. While I can see the attraction of singling out the easy bits—those which would not cause too much trouble, or on which action could be taken quickly—that would unbalance the package and, as a result, ultimately destroy it. So I recommend very strongly that this report be seen as a whole, as a single piece, and not as an ill-assorted collection of bright ideas.

Let us look at the question of the need for private legislation. During the Committee's deliberations there was a point at which some of us had the revolutionary idea that the proving of the preamble should come before the Second Reading. After all, as at least one hon. Gentleman in the House today will know, one can go through the whole procedure on a private Bill, only to lose it by virtue of the fact that the preamble is not proven. The proving of the preamble is at the heart of a private Bill, because that establishes whether the Bill is required, whether it is the only way in which the promoters can obtain the powers that they require. However, we decided not to recommend that alteration, for the simple reason that the Second Reading of a private Bill, unlike that of a public Bill, does not establish affirmation of the principle but represents a vote to allow the Bill to go to a Select Committee for additional examination and discussion. So we left the question of the preamble where it is.

But the word "preamble" is at the heart of many of our concerns in respect of the first group of recommendations. We believe that the authorities who are responsible for examining Bills that are brought to Parliament should be particularly firm and scrupulous in ensuring that nothing is brought if it ought to be dealt with under a general Act of Parliament or in some other way.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I hope that I have followed correctly my hon. Friend's point about the importance of the preamble. Does he not agree that at the Second Reading stage more attention should be paid to the preamble? Is it not at that stage that some Bills should fall, on this ground?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Indeed, I recall that, within the last 12 months, in a debate affecting my constituency, I drew attention to precisely that point. I was opposing a particular Bill. Hon. Members should recognise that it is the reason for legislation that has to be examined first—almost before we get to whether or not the piece of legislation is actually correct.

Let me draw hon. Members' attention to the Committee's comment on remarks made by my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chairman of Committees, Lord Aberdare, when he was giving evidence on 13 January 1988:

> "The Chairman of Committees admitted that many works bills include things for which approval could be obtained under the general law, as well as things for which only parliamentary approval was possible. Indeed, the element requiring parliamentary approval might be only a very minor element of the whole scheme, in which case the effect would be to allow 'a small tail to wag a large dog'."

Indeed, it would be possible for a promoter to search for that small tail. I could give an example, but I will not weary hon. Members with it Promoters could search for the small tail and attach the dog to it, in order to allow a private Bill to come forward.

Again in this area, broadly we are talking about works Bills and powers Bills. My noble Friend, in the evidence that he gave to the Committee, had some very important remarks to make about works Bills:

> "Indeed, where works are at all extensive or controversial I can see the force in the argument that Parliament is not the most suitable forum for determining whether they should be carried out. If, therefore, there is one area more than another in the Private Bill field where an alternative to Private Bill procedure could be usefully explored it seems to me to be that covered by works provisions."

[Mr. McNair-Wilson]

This is a very important point. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, I have had a decade's experience of sponsoring British railways legislation. The fact is that most of those general powers Bills relate to comparatively small works, but if works are to be either very extensive or very controversial, my noble Friend's comments should be uppermost in everyone's mind. As was said by so many of those who gave evidence to the Committee, the problem is that, on occasions of that sort, petitioners feel intimidated, and indeed inhibited, in coming to Parliament to give evidence in unfamiliar surroundings, and would be much happier and more secure in the atmosphere of some public inquiry.

That leads me to those aspects of the primary legislative changes to which my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) referred. Here, of course, we are concerned principally with British Rail; I will deal with the other matters in a moment. I see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is in his place on the Front Bench. British Rail is a statutory body, yet, unusually, it obtains its powers by private Bill. Of course, we know that there is an historical reason for that. Over the years British Rail has been the biggest single customer for private Bills.

As I pointed out at the outset, there is a very large number of private Bills in Parliament at the moment. Among the 58 to which I have referred, 13 are rail-related —not British Rail-related, but rail-related. Railway building, whether the big projects such as I mentioned a moment ago, or light railways—trams and so on—is certainly a matter of great significance. It has been argued —although it is not an argument that one would wish to examine in great detail—that one of the reasons for the private Bill procedure is that it provides an opportunity, at least once a year, for a general debate on the railway system.

I cannot believe that it is not possible to find another way to resolve that problem. In the changed circumstances of today there must be a genuine argument for bringing railway building into line with motorway building. I understand the comments that have been made about the fact that, once the draft order has been agreed by the Secretary of State and so on, we are into that situation, but, as was pointed out earlier, British Rail has not lost a Bill. There have been problems with Bills, but none has been lost.

Mr. Tony Banks: Not yet.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Not yet, but the fact is that the track record so far does not show that people are better off, or more secure, with the present system than they would be in the changed circumstances to which I now want to refer.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend not agree that a particularly telling example of the kind of issue to which he is referring is the proposition that British Rail should seek the right to build a station, with a colossal car park, in the centre of an area that every local authority in the locality has argued should not be used for that sort of development? By doing that through a private Bill, it would be able to avoid all the planning procedures which such a massive change in the road system would otherwise involve.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Without wishing to be drawn into the detail of the King's Cross legislation, I would support my hon. Friend to the extent that, when I came into the Chamber earlier this afternoon, I was handed a letter by my noble Friend Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, who is also the chairman of English Heritage, making precisely that point and arguing that ancient monuments, buildings and the rest are at risk as a result of this procedure. Therefore, the point is well taken.

Our report suggests that we should provide British Rail with an alternative route. It has been suggested that it should have an alternative route now, but as you know only too well, Madam Deputy Speaker, British Rail requires some significant exemptions to be made available to it in order to build its track. It has to have exemption from nuisance and from interference with statutory undertakings and the rest. No general Act of Parliament currently in place would enable it to proceed except in the way that it does.

I can well understand the attraction to British Rail, or any other promoter, of being able not only to seek powers for particular works but to wrap up within the same Bill many additional powers. In a Bill that I sponsored some three or four years ago, the powers of the British Transport police were altered by a proposal slipped in at the end of the schedules.

The second category that the Committee was concerned about related to procedure, on which there were clearly differences of opinion. I said at the outset that this is a balanced package. One of the problems in the passage of private legislation is the failure of promoters to consult adequately petitioners who are worried about the Bill's effect on them. Many problems may not begin to emerge before the Bill is debated.

The report suggests that a clear explanatory memorandum should set out exactly what the Bill seeks to achieve, giving petitioners an idea of what was in the promoter's mind. There could then be a period of consultation before Parliament became involved.

As those of us who follow these matters know, a promoter's statement is made available with a private Bill to Members of Parliament, usually those concerned with a particular Bill. That is a lengthy and detailed document setting out some explanation of the clauses and what the Bill seeks to achieve. We contend that something along those lines should, of necessity, be made available to all when the Bill is deposited, so that petitioners can find out what is in the promoter's mind.

Allied with that document should be a booklet explaining what the private Bill procedure is all about. In the Library are some notes on how the procedure works but, with respect to those who drew up that document, it is, of necessity, fairly slight and limited. Her Majesty's Stationery Office should provide a proper booklet which can be bought by those who are anxious to know how the private Bill procedure may affect them.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): If such a handbook were published for the benefit of the public, would it lead to a greater demand for private Bills as a result of the public feeling that, having studied it, they wanted to bring forward a private Bill for their own purposes?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: At no point in our deliberations did we look at the possibility of abolishing private Bills. To

that extent, the private Bill is part of our democratic process. It is a manifestation of the citizen's right to petition Parliament. If one explains it in such a way that a citizen might feel that a private Bill would be appropriate, always remembering the remarks that I made earlier on the need for legislation, it would be doing good rather than harm and would be a sensible addition to our democratic way of life.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): Can my hon. Friend give me some guidance on a practice that I find rather confusing—that of picking off a project piecemeal? Let me take a hypothetical instance of a promoter who wishes to promote a rail terminal but makes no reference to the route leading to that terminal. Those affected by the route have no locus standi in objecting to the terminal; so, on a narrow legalistic ground, they are ruled out of order and are voiceless in making their opposition to the terminal known.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I hear what my hon. Friend says and I guess that he is referring to the King's Cross legislation. He will know, as will the House, that some 280 petitions have already been received and the locus of those petitioners is being examined. I am sure that my hon. Friend's remarks will have been heard by the British Rail board and others and noted. He highlights one of the problems to which I referred a moment ago.

In the second section on procedure, the Committee made a recommendation, largely as a result of a detailed and interesting memorandum supplied by the right hon. Member for Doncaster, Central, the Chairman of Ways and Means, on the starting date for private Bills, which is November. It was thought that it would be sensible to bring it back a month to October so that Second Readings could start somewhat earlier. There has been some concern about that proposal for a number of reasons, with which I shall not weary the House, and it has been decided that at best a fortnight, not a full month, could be saved. I cannot speak for other Committee members, but I want to make it clear that, if there were insuperable difficulties, I would be prepared to be persuaded. I think that the right hon. Member for Doncaster, Central would agree with that interpretation of the resistance that there has been.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House talked about the carry-over motion. Carrying over from one Session of Parliament to another, or, in the case of a Bill with which I was particularly concerned, from one Parliament to another, distinctly separates the private Bill from the public Bill. The public Bill has to be dealt with within the 12-month Session. That carry-over places tremendous additional power in the hands of the promoter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) pointed out earlier that British Rail had never lost a Bill. Promoters relying on that carry-over principle will always, in my view and I believe in the view of the Committee, have an advantage over petitioners, if for no other reason than that private Bills are not cheap and it is likely that a rich promoter will stay the course rather longer than a poor petitioner. That is why, in my earlier remarks about increasing the cost of private Bills so that the promoter effectively pays about £5,000 per House, we kept the petitioner's figure at £20, and there is no question of raising that.

Our suggestion that no more than two carry-overs would normally be accepted is reasonable, bearing in mind that there are those who have already spent time and money, either petitioning or as part of the promoter's group, whom it might not be sensible to require to start the Bill all over again.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is it not a fact that a carry-over motion can be objected to in the House and that the Chairman of Ways and Means will at some stage find time for a debate? So we have it in our power to stop a Bill carrying over to the next Session. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it might concentrate the minds of promoters wonderfully if we turned down a carry-over motion on a future occasion? The King's Cross measure might be a good one to start with.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which relates to my early remarks concerning the assumption that, if private Bills are in existence, they must be right—the point about the preamble and so on—and his intervention is further evidence of the assumption that the carry-over is an automatic advantage which is not normally objected to, an issue to which I shall return.

A suggestion in the report to which reference has not been made is that of establishing a private legislation panel of Members. The Committee took evidence from the parliamentary Bar, the members of which are more conversant with private Bills than any individual Member. In its evidence on 2 December 1987, on page 137, it said:

> "The procedures under which private bill committees operate are in some respects old fashioned, ill defined and unsophisticated. There is abundant scope for reforms which would greatly improve the quality of this part of the decision making process. It has become apparent in recent years that Members of the House of Commons find it increasingly difficult to take part continuously in the quasi-judicial work of the committees; and thus there is a widening gulf in the quality of the decision making process between the two Houses."

That was stern criticism. It was being said that these Bills are not being properly considered—because Members are not sufficiently interested or because they cannot strike out five or six weeks from their diaries—and, as a result, the decision-making process is threatened. I appreciate that. Indeed, it could be argued that the genesis of the inquiry which the Joint Committee undertook was that at least one hon. Lady was unable to strike out a long enough time from her diary to enable her to attend.

I said in my opening remarks that there was a big difference between a Committee on a private Bill and a Standing Committee on a public Bill. In a Standing Committee, the sides are broadly balanced and there are Whips to arrange pairs and so on, and in normal circumstances a reasonably civilised regime can be established.

But with a private Bill we have something more akin to a jury in a court—it is quasi-judicial—and if Members absent themselves from the Committee and it is inquorate and can no longer undertake its work, the corridors of Parliament may be full of silks and other legal advisers, not to mention the witnesses, petitioners and the rest, all of whom are unable to take part in the work of the Committee because it can no longer operate, with the attendant expense and inefficiency to which that must lead.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman explain the proposed panel in more detail? It would seem

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

to place an even greater burden on Members. My hon. Friends the Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall) gave up a great deal of time recently when dealing with Bills. Would not a panel demand a few Members having to repeat that process of giving up a great deal of their time? While I appreciate that it might be a more efficient way of proceeding, would it be a reasonable request to make of Members?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I was about to deal with that point. I have long held the belief, having been in the House for 25 years, that many Members in all parts of the House would like to be involved in a job of work apart from the normal day-to-day activity of looking after their constituents, which is their primary job. In other words, there are Members who, if they recognised that a panel considering private Bills had been established, might want to spend some of their parliamentary life in this interesting and important part of the legislative machine.

I hope that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is not construing my remarks as referring to a press-ganged group of individuals forced on to a panel. That is far outside what the Committee had in mind. They would be volunteers, and perhaps it would be the same route as the Chairmen's Panel and others would follow. If such a panel were established, one would, hopefully, not have the problem of Members absenting themselves, because they would know what they were in for.

We are dealing with a large legislative programme in this Session from the point of view of private Bills. We would have the satisfaction of well-manned committees, and perhaps the Whips and other responsible bodies in all parties could take note of the extra work being done by those Members, and some compensating lightening of the rein might be generally available.

Mr. Spearing: While, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman advanced, there might be dangers in such a concept, the disadvantages might be overcome if Members made themselves available—just as some do in respect of the Finance Bill—for a year or two for this work and without the consequential rewards to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says, but if we take the voices in the House today and consider whether individual Members want to serve on the Committee dealing with the King's Cross Bill, we might get a clear sign that not all are greatly enthusiastic to do so. However, some would wish to do so. The Joint Committee's suggestion would not commit any Member to anything particularly difficult. It is an idea that should be examined.

Sir John Stradling Thomas (Monmouth): What my hon. Friend is suggesting seems a feasible proposition, which we might try as an experiment. There is an old saying about volunteers being better than pressed men. I have never been aware of a paucity of supply to join the Chairman's Panel. This proposal is worth an experiment, because the work is time-consuming. I have met colleagues who, unexpectedly, have told me how much they enjoy the work of the private Bill procedure, so, if only as an experiment, it is worth trying it out.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who exactly describes my own feelings. The Committee was unanimous on that point, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will at least consider the possibility of examining whether such a panel could be established, which will be important in the years ahead.

My right hon. Friend made reference to the recommendation to remove the oral objection procedure. At the start of my remarks, I commented that there should be proper consultation so that no time is wasted. I go further. The point should be reached where a decision one way or another can be made, so that Parliament can move on to deal with other, perhaps more important matters. The oral objection followed by the blocking motion gives an indication to the Chairman of Ways and Means that a Second Reading debate will be necessary. The oral objection gives the first indication that not everyone is happy with the Bill. Subsequently, a motion appears on the Order Paper.

The Select Committee is anxious to remove an almost unnecessary procedure, because the blocking motion can go on the Order Paper anyway. It was suggested that a reason be given in the blocking motion so that the promoter will have an indication of where the individuals concerned felt the Bill had problems. That is all part of signalling what is wrong as quickly as possible, so that discussion can take place and so that one can avoid the minefield of procedural hurdles that currently exists.

I hear what my right hon. Friend says about the individual constituency Member, and it may be that my right hon. Friend will want to consider altering the numbers concerned. However, a blocking motion that indicates what is wrong with the Bill would be in everyone's interest, as it would allow the promoter to take corrective action. That is why we suggest a simple majority for the closure motion. We are all familiar with the existing arrangements, which require 100 right hon. and hon. Members to go through the Aye Lobby, and all the rest of it. Again that is a form of trip wire. Many right hon. and hon. Members know that, with a small private Bill, perhaps taken on a Thursday evening, when there is no particularly contentious business to follow, it is not easy for a sponsor to rustle up 100 right hon. and hon. Members to go through the Aye Lobby. I do not say that it cannot be done, but the Committee suggests that a decision should be reached by simple majority.

The original intention was to ensure that nothing came before the House that could be achieved in some other way. We would prove the preamble to start with, and the business should then be progressed as swiftly as possible so that, if necessary, the Committee could consider the Bill in a thorough and detailed way, with advocates for both parties arguing their case. Procedural trip wires, attractive though they may be, do not serve any useful function other than to make matters generally difficult. I ask my right hon. Friend to consider the suggestion for a blocking motion alongside that for closure on a simple majority.

Mr. Moate: As my hon. Friend knows, I support his remarks and his recommendations. However, does he concur in the view expressed by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) that, in removing the trip wires and hurdles, it would be unfair if we did not maintain the balance of the package, which would make it easier for petitioners and objectors, at public inquiries or otherwise, to have their case put clearly?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the package concept; it needs underscoring the whole time.

I turn to one of the proposals with which my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) is himself closely associated—the Joint Committee option. That option is already available, but it is not automatically drawn to the attention of the parties concerned. In the case of some Bills, it can be a waste of everyone's time to have two Committees—all the second House problems—when, if the parties agree, a Joint Committee could solve all the difficulties. The suggestion is that it should be made very clear to those concerned with a private Bill that the joint option exists. If the parties agree that that route should be followed, the Joint Committee should be used, rather than take up additional time elsewhere.

In drawing to the end of my remarks, I want to comment briefly on matters of no lesser importance, but which are dealt with at the end of the report. I refer, first, to Scottish private legislation. The Select Committee's recommendations are broadly that the procedural changes it proposes should, as nearly as possible, affect Scotland as well. In considering Scotland, the Committee's real difficulty was the view widely expressed by those who gave evidence on that aspect—that the Scottish Office is not always good enough and that information is not always readily available from it.

I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has already taken action on that matter, and that some criticisms have already been dealt with. The Secretary of State for Scotland is rather different from any other, and contact with the Scottish Office is important when legislation is being passed. The report proposes a tidying up of better relations with the Scottish Office, which it feels is particularly necessary.

As to the special procedure orders of 1945, the House will know that they were largely brought into being as a consequence of the need for reconstruction after the second world war. Usually they worked well, but a glaring omission that concerned a number of people concerned the Okehampton bypass. In recommendation 51, the Committee suggests:

> "If a petition of general objection is referred to a joint committee, and the joint committee finds in favour of the petitioners, then the Government ought not to over-rule the committee by means of a Confirmation Bill."

I was delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made special reference to that matter because, with the one exception I mentioned, that procedure works well.

The Committee endeavoured to produce not just a balanced package but one that re-establishes the balance between Parliament, the citizen, the promoter and the petitioner that offers a blueprint for a procedural system that should, with some luck, last as long as those that have been examined over the past 30 years.

There is no doubt that private legislation will be with us for as long as parliamentary democracy exists. However, there is no use denying that pressures on Parliament today are much greater than they were when I entered the House 25 years ago. We now have European legislation and other matters to consider, and the varying scope of private Bills has increased so substantially that I hope the House finds favour with the report and will accept its recommendations.

6.18 pm

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): It is unusual but not unprecedented for an occupant of the Chair to seek to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, for permission to speak from the Floor of the House.

As the Leader of the House said when opening the debate, the Chairman of Ways and Means has many responsibilities relating to private Bills. It was felt, therefore, that a "Ways and Means view" might assist the House in its deliberations. That is the reason for my intervention.

I am grateful to the Leader of the House for the tribute that he paid to my right hon. Friend the Chairman of Ways and Means, who was hoping to speak in the debate. Unfortunately, he is unavoidably absent; therefore, the task falls to me. I believe that my remarks will have the support of the Chairman of Ways and Means.

I join in congratulating the Joint Committee on its wide-ranging report. In particular, as has already been said, the House is grateful to the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) for his sure hand in guiding the Joint Committee through the complexities of private Bill procedure, as well as the procedues relating to special procedure orders and Scottish private legislation. Under his guidance, the Joint Committee has carried out a major and extensive analysis of those matters.

The Joint Committee was kind enough to invite the Chairman of Ways and Means to give evidence to it twice, and also to involve him in its final decision-making process. Therefore, he had the opportunity to see and, for the most part, to agree with, its final conclusions. Subject to one or two matters, which I shall raise presently, he strongly supported the Committee's suggested changes to the procedures of the House. The Joint Committee has seen fit to adopt many of the reforms that the Chairman of Ways and Means suggested in his evidence.

The House will be relieved to hear that I do not propose to repeat in detail all the points made by the Chairman in his evidence. However, some remarks may be helpful to the House in connection with a number of the proposed changes. As the shadow Leader of the House and the hon. Member for New Forest emphasised, the Committee was concerned about the share of Parliament's valuable time that was taken up by the promotion of Bills on behalf of private interests. That reflects the view held by hon. Members on both sides of the House that the burden of private legislation should be considerably lessened.

There will always be a need for some private legislation, but much could be done to lighten the burden on the House. The Joint Committee's recommendations—set out in part 2 of its report and summarised in recommendations 1 to 10 in paragraph 201—will go a long way to achieve that objective, which is especially desired by those hon. Members who have been closeted in an opposed private Bill Committee for any appreciable length of time.

In addition, the Joint Committee has sought to close an unwelcome loophole in our procedures that has permitted promoters to avoid planning procedures that might expose them to trouble and expense. It is clearly undesirable that the will of Parliament, as expressed in statutory planning procedures, should be evaded by another form of our procedures. I commend to the House the remarks in the report about planning procedures.

[The First Deputy Chairman]

A major source of disgruntlement among hon. Members about the present procedures for dealing with private Bills is the arrangement for taking opposed Bills in a specially convened Committee of Members who are completely disinterested about the Bill's fate. Sometimes, these Committees' stages can be lengthy, which has resulted in hon. Members feeling that their unwilling presence on a private Bill Committee—a type of Committee which, uniquely in our procedure, they are obliged to attend—takes them away from business in the House that they regard as their primary duty. Some Members find it hard to justify their presence on a Committee dealing with matters related to a part of the country that is probably far from their own constituency. They often preface their complaints with, "I wasn't elected to make judgments on this."

While one might not agree with that view of the duties of hon. Members, I sympathise with it. We live in an age when the local Member of Parliament is expected to take a close and active interest in his or her constituency. Gone are the days when a Member could seek election to a seat on the base of a promise not to visit his constituency.

Mr. Tony Banks: It might still work.

The First Deputy Chairman: Though we may sometimes envy those more leisurely days, we must never forget that they are past. We may therefore wish strongly to support the Joint Committee's suggestion—to which the hon. Member for New Forest referred, and which should suit modern working practice better than the present system—that a panel of Members should be created from which members of opposed Bill Committees should be selected. They could be selected exclusively from the panel or on the basis of a proportion—such as three panel Members to two non-panel Members on each committee. Service on a new panel of members of opposed Bill Committees might act as an excellent apprenticeship for service on the Chairmen's Panel. That suggestion has already been made in the debate by a number of hon. Members.

Such a scheme would certainly give hon. Members who were interested an opportunity to develop the sensitivity to our procedures and the common sense that are necessary attributes of members of the Chairmen's Panel.

We might also support the suggestion that the number of Members on a Committee should be raised to five, and the rule requiring Members who failed to attend to be reported to the House should be abolished. Those changes, combined with a lightening of the burden of private business, as a result of the adoption of the other recommendations in the report, should go a long way to satisfy the complaints relating to service on opposed Bill Committees.

The only caveat to be registered at this juncture is that the selection of panel members to serve on particular Bills should remain with the Committee of Selection. In many cases, private Bills are fairly uncontentious, but for the sake of those which are highly contentious and hard fought, it would be a mistake to allow the Chairman of Ways and Means, or any other single member, to choose members to serve on an unopposed Bill Committee.

The Chairman of Ways and Means differs from the Joint Committee over recommendation 37, that an option should be offered to parties of a Joint Committee stage, which would cut down costs and time on both sides. That option, the broad aims of which the Chairman of Ways and Means supports, will fail to be taken up in those cases which most deserve the use of the procedure. The proposal should be stronger: we favour a period in which a Joint Committee stage is mandatory.

As has been mentioned in the debate, each year it is necessary to allow private Bills to be carried over from one Session to the next. That is partly caused by, and partly causes, a log jam in private business, and that is inconvenient. The Joint Committee has suggested in recommendations 16 and 17, that only in exceptional circumstances should private Bills be permitted to be carried over for more than two Sessions, and that a private Bill should be expected to complete its progress within a single Session.

The Joint Committee also recommends that requests for carry-overs should not be acceded to unless the promoters can show that they have not been dilatory. I am pleased to tell the House that the Chairman of Ways and Means is careful to ensure that promoters' agents do not expect a carry-over as of right. He expects that most Bills should be able to pass through their stages in two Sessions—rather than one, as suggested by the Joint Committee in recommendation 16.

The House may wish to support the principle underlying the recommendations, which is that Bills must proceed with all possible expedition. We advise the House, however, not to require them to become rules in Standing Orders. The present system works in a flexible manner, allowing the application of the principles to the best advantage of the House. There will always be Bills of great importance, possibly of national importance, which will be fought hard and will require a greater allocation of parliamentary time than would normally be politic. I hope that the House will continue to have confidence in the ability of the Chairman of Ways and Means and his successors to apply a suitable discipline in choosing which Bills may be submitted to the House for its consent that they be carried over. The final choice in each case, of course, lies with the House.

The Joint Committee also considered the position of Bills that are interrupted by the Dissolution of Parliament before a general election. It suggested in recommendation 18 that such Bills should not, as they are now, be carried over by means of a single portmanteau resolution, but should be subject to separate revival motions in the new Parliament. The Committee drew attention to the comparative lack of pressure on parliamentary time at the beginning of a Parliament, and the need for a new Parliament to re-examine the principle behind each Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means feels that that idea is unrealistic in its assessment of the Government's willingness to find time for debates on separate Bills, and that it overlooks the fact that Bills not passed by the House of Commons and requiring a carry-over on Dissolution will involve at least an opportunity for debate on Third Reading. In any event, we should keep in sight the basic principle that promoters should not be disadvantaged by events unconnected with the merits of their Bills, such as a Dissolution.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Surely, after a general election, when the composition of Parliament has changed, there is a considerable advantage in obtaining a vote on the principle of a Bill as soon as possible. If the vote took place

only on Third Reading, would it not be very unfair on the Members who had served on the Committee if, because of a substantial change in membership of the House, the principle was no longer acceptable? Carry-over has the advantage of securing a vote fairly quickly to establish whether the principle of a Bill will carry from one Parliament to the next.

The First Deputy Chairman: I understand the point made by the hon. Gentleman. The matter can be argued either way, and clearly requires careful consideration before any changes are made.

The final point of substance that I wish to raise relates to the proposed requirements in recommendations 20 and 21 that blocking motions should contain reasons for the blocking of Bills, and that "blocks" should be signed by at least six Members. It is difficult to see how a system of reasoned amendments could be policed; presumably the Chairman of Ways and Means or another Officer of the House would be called on either to limit excessively prolix arguments or to judge whether a purely formal reason was good enough.

The Chairman of Ways and Means supports the possibility of some sort of statement in the "block" explaining why the Bill is opposed only in so far as it is a voluntary method of communicating the reasons for opposition to the promoters so that negotiations may start. His objection to a minimum number of names being required before a blocking motion becomes effective is similarly based on difficulty of enforcement and lack of real utility. After all, few hon. Members are so deeply unpopular that they could not find five friends to come to their aid by lending their names to a blocking motion.

Hon. Members may be rather surprised that a speech that started with praise should continue in an apparently rather critical vein. Let me therefore commend the Joint Committee's recommendation 39, relating to fees, and encourage the House earnestly to support its speedy introduction in time for the next Session. The House may also support the view of the Chairman of Ways and Means —not mentioned in the report—that, to save the administrative trouble and expense of pursuing small debts in respect of petitions against Bills, prepayment of the fee should be a condition of a party's being heard before the Committee.

I hope that those points on matters of detail have in no way camouflaged the support given by the Chairman of Ways and Means and myself to the broad principles of the report, and our appreciation of the Joint Committee's work. The Committee came into being because the procedures of the House were seen to be outmoded. Much contained in the report, especially in relation to Committee proceedings, will go far to revolutionise arrangements for dealing with private legislation if the House lends its support to the Joint Committee's proposals. We all look forward with great interest to the contributions of other hon. Members, and hope that a clear green light can be given to the adoption of the best material in the report.

6.35 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me immediately after the Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, as it gives me a good opportunity to express hon. Members' views on the work done by the Chairman of Ways and Means, his colleagues and his staff. Some of us are aware of matters with which they must involve themselves; the fact that they work silently and invisibly is a tribute to their activities, and may not be appreciated by others. It also marks the unusual feature of the Chairman or his deputy speaking in the House, and, indeed, the essential nature of today's debate.

We are not involved here with matters of partisan politics or of ordinary parliamentary procedure; we are, I submit, discussing what the future rules of the high court of Parliament shall be. They are not the rules that relate to our public legislation or party political philosophy. Almost all, by their very nature, are outside the normal political battle.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) and his Committee for their careful piece of work. If, at first glance, my comments seem to the hon. Gentleman to be picking apart what he considers a balanced package, I hope that he will understand that that is because I wish to produce—after a few preliminary remarks—what I hope is a coherent broader approach that suggests ways of achieving the aims of his Committee, perhaps through an alternative package or at least an alternative concept.

Before I do that, however, let me comment on one or two aspects of private Bill procedure in general. I have been involved in it for nearly 20 years, in many different guises: objecting to Bills, moving instructions to Bills, moving motions to Bills and, finally, serving as Chairman of the Committee considering a controversial Bill, the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill. Some thoughts have come to me over the years, and I hope that they may be helpful to others.

First, should we not think a little about terminology? "Private legislation" is not private at all; anything that happens in the House, and anything that is legislative, is public. There is also the problem of private Members' Bills, which are not private legislation. Private legislation promoted by public bodies—including, as I recall, the Greater London council—may be in the general public interest, or conceivably in a private interest. Private legislation promoted by a private body may be generally agreed to concern the public interest. We do not do ourselves much good with our terminology.

I suggest, for want of a better solution, that we begin to distinguish between externally and internally promoted legislation, some of which is promoted by the Government and some by hon. Members in their own right. Whether we can find better words for "external" or "internal"—perhaps find some appropriate Norman French—I am not sure, but I suggest that we have a go.

The second aspect, the rights of promotion, has already been touched on by the hon. Member for New Forest. One of the tests of a democracy is who can promote legislation. In this country, theoretically and perhaps practically for matters such as a deceased wife's sister Bill and that sort of thing, any individual can promote a Bill and petition the House that it be passed or that it be not passed—hence the phrase "petitions for Bills". The right is not confined to hon. Members. Compared with the constitutions of assemblies in other countries, our is enormously flexible in this respect, so I would be very wary of restricting, in theory at least, that ancient and proper democratic right.

All of us, but particularly my hon. Friends, are worried about what is regarded as an abuse of that right or an inappropriate use of it, particularly when, by its use, bodies that already possess power or substantial resources

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

can appear to override the rights of individuals. That is where an increasing concern has given rise to many of the matters that we have been discussing.

The abuses or inappropriate uses fall into several broad categories. The first is the proof of the preamble, the averment. We referred to this in our special report on the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill, HC 650 87/8, where we found that although legislation was required, it was not of the kind that was placed before us. It was the example par excellence of the tail wagging the dog: a Bill in Parliament was required but it was not the Bill that was placed before us.

Another category of concern about the extent of private legislation is where Bills appear to cut out the preliminary procedures that one might expect, particularly in matters relating to strategic planning. King's Cross has been mentioned; it has enormous strategic planning significance. So has a Bill that we may expect next year—I do not know what it will be called; perhaps the high speed British Rail Channel tunnel Bill or Channel tunnel route Bill.

Perhaps I can give an example whose implications are now being realised and which hon. Members may not even have heard of, the London Docklands Light Railway (City Extension) Act 1986. Its passage triggered the whole of the Canary wharf development which will have enormous strategic implications for London and the south-east and will probably spawn its own railway Bills next Session.

The next category has not so far been mentioned. It is where a private Bill can have party political or party philosophical overtones or have economic implications for the country. The North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill for the importation of coal for electricity comes into that category. Much more hung on that Bill than the building of a port. I suspect that the Felixstowe Bill had similar implications.

We have, therefore, several categories of Bills between which we may have to distinguish in future as we consider how far the so-called private Bill procedure is appropriate.

Before I return to that point, I want to comment on the whole question of railway Bills. This is where I must disagree strongly with my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), on the balance of considerations that he has reached in respect of these Bills. I take at once the point of the hon. Member for New Forest, that up till now they have not failed to get through, but he and, perhaps, the Committee may have overlooked the hidden, negative factor of the need for a Bill. The fact that there is a need for a Bill may assist in filtering and tailoring the provisions that can be got through. It acts as a silent censor; there is a need to come here, where hon. Members from any part of the country may object because they dislike a level crossing or whatever it may be. I am not, therefore, sure that I would accept that they have not failed to get through as a good reason for saying that we need not have them at all.

I understand that many of the small powers relating to footbridges, underpasses and so on, could be dealt with initially by planning application. That might be an advantage. But if it means that we should say that we do not want railway Bills here at all—which seems to be the purport of recommendation 6 and paragraph 47—I challenge that strongly for another reason, which I will come to in a moment.

Mr. Moate: Will the hon. Gentleman pursue the logic of his argument—and I am genuinely interested in his answer—to suggest that when a British Rail high-speed link Bill is proposed it will be better dealt with by parliamentary procedure or by a separate public inquiry?

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman points the way to something that I should like to say later. Perhaps I may pursue a narrow way for the moment. It was conceded by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras that transferring to the Secretary of State the final decision on these matters would deprive Parliament of its present long-stop and final powers. I immediately ask if we should, in principle, hand over powers from the legislature to the Executive. In principle, I say that we should not. If we do so, we must consider very carefully the reasons.

The best argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras could advance was that since the proposal would get through in any case, in view of the Government majority, we might as well let the Secretary of State for Transport have the power from the beginning. I cannot go down that road. Given certain suggestions that I shall make shortly, it is an inappropriate recommendation. I am sorry to disagree with the Committee on that matter——

Mr. Moate *rose*——

Mr. Spearing: I will come to the point in a minute.

—particularly in view of the fact that we may be entering a new era of railway building; if the motorways get any more crowded and demand for travel and freight transport goes up, that will be inevitable. We have already seen the beginning of a new era of light railway building. Docklands is a case in point. If it had been a tramway there, rather than a light railway, it should not have gone to the Secretary of State, for reasons that I have already advanced.

So I suggest that we may be doing Parliament a disservice. Given the safeguards that I shall come to in a moment, I am sure that everybody would consider that power should not go to the Executive but should be retained by the House.

Mr. Moate: Again pursuing the logic of the hon. Gentleman's case, if he is saying that the parliamentary sanction is important for projects of this nature, it must surely be extended to major motorway projects and other matters which are currently dealt with by planning procedures.

Mr. Spearing: That is logically the case, but I would hesitate to argue at this stage that Parliament should take more powers to itself, particularly on motorways—that is a motorway that I will not go down. All I am saying is that we should not give up the ultimate powers that we, as opposed to the Government, now possess.

Nevertheless I understand why the Committee made its suggestion. The absence of any widespread and proper inquiry into the strategic implications of a railway is a great gap, which could have been filled by the Executive but which it has, on this occasion, chosen not to fill.

It is much easier for petitioners and objectors to appear before a local public inquiry than to come to this place. I have done both. Members of the public are inhibited from appearing before a Committee, where they see people wearing wigs and gowns. The public are more at ease if

they appear before an inspector at a public inquiry where there is greater informality. Ideally, we need a combination of both.

Hon. Members will say that that would take more time. It may. However, if we are to maintain our democratic procedures, we have to pay the price. Time may be one of them. Big interests are often in a hurry, whereas citizens often say, "Let's take time to get it right." Moreover, the locus of those who petition this place against a Bill is very much narrower than their locus when they appear before a public inquiry.

The question that arises, therefore, is how we can combine the democratic safeguards of both procedures. Recommendations 20 to 22 would bring about a change in the procedure. Blocking motions could be used by hon. Members. I am very concerned about recommendations 20 to 22. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) agrees that over the years the powers of individual Members to require a debate have been used. Hon. Members may believe that those powers have been abused. Even if that were conceded—I do not concede it—I do not believe that any diminution of the power of individual Members of Parliament should be accepted without great thought. The individual Member represents individuals outside Parliament. Any diminution of our power to delay private legislation, to require consultation behind the scenes, or to require some form of just and proper concession would lead to the powers of hon. Members being forfeited. Therefore, I am not convinced by recommendations 20 to 22.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: As I understand the report, all that it is saying is that if we did not follow the procedure at 2.30, when we sit in our places and shout "Object" to the Second Reading or Committee stage of a Bill, we should be able instead to table a motion in the Private Bill Office. I do not mind too much about coming here at 2.30 to object, but it is an arcane procedure. I should have thought that it would be just as easy to table a motion as to come here in person.

Mr. Spearing: I apologise if I have misunderstood my hon. Friend, but I thought that reasons had to be given. Recommendation 21 says:

"Blocking motions should not be effective unless they are signed by at least six Members."

Recommendation 22 says:

"The procedure for objecting orally to a bill should be abolished."

I believe that those recommendations will diminish rather than enhance the powers of individual Members. Abolition of the closure by 100 Members would, I believe, benefit the promoter. I am not sure about that, either.

Mr. Tony Banks: If my hon. Friend looks at today's Order Paper and the private business after Prayers he will see that, apart from the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and the King's Cross Railways Bill, to which both my hon. Friend and I object, six hon. Members do not object to any of the other Bills. I have no constituency interest in the Hythe, Kent, Marina Bill but it has been put to me that a number of principles are involved and that the House ought to discuss them on Second Reading. According to regulation (21), I should have to find three other hon. Members to add their names to the Hythe, Kent, Marina Bill. That would not be too difficult. It is a bit of a nonsense, like early-day motions. Nevertheless, I do not believe that we should be placed at a great disadvantage.

Mr. Spearing: It is a matter of judgment. The British Film Institute Southbank Bill is on the Order Paper and my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is the sole objector. If the rule were to be changed, I suggest that he would be placed at a minimal disadvantage.

I turn to the alternative package approach, which I base on the agreeable recommendation 1. I do not think that the fact that this is the first recommendation is accidental. It says:

"Promoters of a private bill should be required to prove before the committee on the bill that private legislation is necessary to secure the primary purpose of the bill."

I was a member of a Committee when the preamble of a Bill was not proved. The Committee sat for three weeks. That disrupted my life and the lives of my three colleagues. The proceedings lasted for 80 hours. Therefore, I welcome wholeheartedly that recommendation. However, I wonder whether it ought to apply before or after Second Reading. If it applied before Second Reading, it would save people a lot of time.

The hon. Member for New Forest referred to a diversion. I shall take that one step further. Why should we not introduce a perimeter procedure or perimeter fence, or —to use an agricultural analogy—an electric fence: moreover, to mix one's metaphors, an electric fence that, by means of radar, directs people to the gaps? In other words, a greater form of perimeter examination than we have at the moment ought to be put in place to reflect the general will of the House on the type of private legislation that it believes is acceptable.

It must not be just a question of proving the preamble and the averment, and the tail wagging the dog. Perhaps we ought not to accept big Bills with huge implications before certain other procedures have been exhausted. That would be a novelty, as would be the non-acceptance of Bills that have public policy implications which have not been properly debated and defined by the Government or others.

I accept that that would be a radical change, but it would be a development of an existing procedure. Some of the machinery is already in place. Much of it is invisible and much of it is conducted by learned Clerks and their associates. There are the examiners and there is the Court of Referees. At the moment, the court is concerned only with decisions on locus and related matters. The Standing Orders Committee meets occasionally. It deals with the compliance of private Bills with Standing Orders and occasionally it allows an exemption, even if compliance with Standing Orders is shown not to have taken place.

Why should we not develop a code that would mean that a petitioner for a Bill would have to go through a certain number of hoops before the Second Reading Motion is tabled by the Chairman of Ways and Means? The code would have to be agreed according to precedent and it would have to reflect the views of the House. Almost inevitably, it would have to be developed by a Joint Committee of both Houses. The manpower implications might be relieved if it were to be a Joint Committee that assumed the functions of a court. People might ask why that Committee should have such huge powers. But we do that already by giving a Private Bill Committee the power to dispose of a Bill under Standing Orders, unless there is

[Mr. Spearing]

some exceptional procedure. The Bill in which I was involved was sunk by a Committee which was committed by the rest of the House to listen to all the evidence, to consider it in great detail and to make a decision. I suggest that the same principle might be applied to some perimeter body, perhaps multi-functional, appointed by the House to supervise the general procedures relating to private legislation. If that suggestion were developed, at least in concept, it might be able to deal with some of the problems that have been properly identified by the Joint Committee and give cause for hon. Members' complaints.

There would be several advantages to such a system. It would maintain the final powers of Parliament to decide and would not transfer to the Executive any decisions that are currently taken by Parliament. It would maintain hon. Members' individual rights to represent the interests of their constituents, and, therefore, defend the liberty of the subject; properly supervised and worked, it would restrain and perhaps restrict the promotion of private legislation that some hon. Members or the entire House might consider inappropriate to current circumstances.

I hope that, in considering such proposals, Parliament will evolve from its ancient procedures and develop all that is necessary in this place for the common good and the protection of individuals and their liberties.

7.1 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I welcome the report and congratulate the Joint Committee which produced it. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) on his masterly exposition and the clarity with which he set out the problems and the recommendations which might solve them.

Like many hon. Members I was acquiescent to the procedures of the House until I came up against a particular issue which affected me and my constituents directly and personally. It was not until British Rail proposed a recent private Bill with implications that went beyond the terms of that Bill that I realised the inadequacies of the present procedure. My views reflect those of many of my constituents affected by the proposals in the Bill. All right-minded and reasonable people recognise that from time to time individuals have to make sacrifices in the interests of the majority. Most people are prepared to accept those sacrifices as long as they feel that the system under which those sacrifices are made is fair and based upon equity and justice, and, moreover, one in which they have the right to be heard and make their views known. The private Bill procedure and practice in the House is defective on one, two or three of those points.

Recently I have been involved in opposing the King's Cross Railways Bill. As drafted, the Bill is self-contained and merely makes reference to British Rail's promotion of a terminal in north London. I understand that it makes no reference whatsoever to the routes leading to that terminal, but we all know that that terminal would not exist in isolation and would have direct consequences for the routes that lead to it. The Bill implies that other Bills will be brought forward. The very existence of the Bill to establish a terminal at King's Cross predetermines other consequences for the routes which lead to it. Those who are directly affected by it, not only in the King's Cross area, but in south London, south-east London and Kent, all the way to Folkestone, realise that their lives will be changed by a proposal about which they have no opportunity whatsoever to make their voices heard and make their opposition known. That, coupled with the rather antiquated mumbo-jumbo which surrounds so many of our procedures, makes them feel that they are unable to articulate and voice their opposition and they are opposed by those who, through cunning draftsmanship and legalistic strategems, deny them the opportunity to state their opposition.

When they have got over the first legal hurdle of putting in a petition, which seems to require witchcraft spells to make it understandable in its interpretation, they have to appear before a Court of Referees, which appears to interpret their opposition or rule them out of order on very narrow legalistic lines, and they feel that they are being denied basic justice. If our constituents come to the House to voice their opposition to a measure which will dramatically change their lives, their families, their homes and their communities, and have no opportunity to make their voices heard and are ruled out, we have progressed very little beyond the middle ages and it is high time to reform our procedures and make them more responsive and more accessible to those affected by proposed legislation.

I am pleased that the Joint Committee report contains some proposals which appear to alleviate the problems which I identified, relating the principle to the particular. Recommendation 13 states:

"Each House should incorporate environmental impact assessment".

Regrettably, British Rail's proposals for King's Cross and for the route that runs through my constituency show no evidence whatsoever that there has been any environmental assessment of effects on the human environment, the natural environment and the urban environment. The proposals appear to have been cobbled together. No doubt in due course some glossy document will be produced, purporting to address the environmental issues, but that will be a piece of icing, or an afterthought, on the basic proposals.

Another principle which appears to have been overlooked, or to which only lip service has been paid, is consultation. The only consultation which British Rail had before producing its proposals for King's Cross or for the route was a public meeting which in no way could be regarded as consultation. It was merely a confrontation at which the spokesman for British Rail batted a straight bat the whole way, conceded nothing and accepted none of the views that were expressed at the time. People feel that the battle was lost before anything was on the pitch. If we, as Members of Parliament are conniving with and acceding to procedures which leave people with a sense of injustice, it is high time that we changed those procedures and implemented the recommendations in the report.

Mr. Moate: I understand my hon. Friend's argument and I am most impressed with his eloquence. We understand the sense of grievance among his constituents, but why does he believe that a public inquiry—the solution that we favour—apart from allowing them a hearing, might produce a more beneficial result from their point of view?

Mr. Bowden: My hon. Friend prompts me to address a point that I might have overlooked. There is a feeling that proposals put forward by private Bill follow the salami

principle where a slice is taken off here and there individually so that they are not noticed elsewhere. What is proposed now is a Channel tunnel at one end linking us to France and a terminal at the other end where trains will arrive, but there is no discussion about what lies in between. I imagine that British Rail will put forward proposals which treat the route as a whole. From what I can see, under our procedures British Rail could take it station by station. It could pick the route off, cutting the slices even thinner. So what we would have would not be a major planning operation, as it should be, but several mini-plans which together would have a dramatic effect which could not be recognised at the beginning.

As I understand it, the essence of the report is that if a major planning operation affects different areas, it should be treated in its entirety as a comprehensive project and not picked off point by point, which seems to be the procedure now. British Rail's proposal will not only affect the south-east but have implications for the north-east and the north-west, because it will open up the whole country to Europe. People want to see a project in the round and as a whole and not bit by bit.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I give the hon. Gentleman another point in answer to his hon. Friend's question? If there were a public inquiry, more people could make their views heard more audibly. Indeed, they would be heard where it matters most. They might be heard by the Prime Minister herself, who could more clearly gauge the degree of public opposition. Nothing concentrates the minds of the Prime Minister and politicians generally more than the clattering down of party majorities that might follow.

Mr. Bowden: I will not follow the hon. Gentleman down that path.

Certain questions that are basic and fundamental to the overall proposals that come out in separate private Bills have not been addressed. The first one, which I raised earlier this afternoon and which I make no apology for raising again, is whether it is necessary for every piece of freight and for every passenger coming from the continent to any destination in the United Kingdom to go through central London. That assumption is in the proposals put forward by British Rail, which seems to think that it is good that they should. The House or a public inquiry should ask seriously whether that assumption is right.

A private Bill does not allow at the earliest stage the opportunity to ask such questions. I shall be more parochial, but it is the particular that illustrates the principle. BR proposes that the tunnel proposed in outline should have a spur rising from the ground in my constituency at Warwick gardens and then tracking five or six miles around south and south-east London, over viaducts and bridges and on embankments, through Denmark hill, Loughborough junction, Brixton, Clapham, Wandsworth and Vauxhall before it gets to Waterloo. That is some eight miles above ground which will be rather dangerous, considering the speed of the trains. If one looks at the map and studies existing tunnels, one sees that it would not be beyond the wit of engineers to make a connection from somewhere near London bridge underground to Waterloo, a distance of less than one mile. That is a fundamental point that a public inquiry would winkle out but which would be taken as an assumption in a private Bill. I raise these issues because they illustrate the principle.

A further point, that has been alluded to several times in the debate, is that the private Bill procedure should be limited to one Session of Parliament and that only in exceptional circumstances should it roll over. If that were adhered to, there is no doubt that the King's Cross Railways Bill, and any subsequent British Rail Bill relating to the Channel tunnel link, would not fall within that ambit. I refer to recommendation 16 on page 53.

I welcome the report and most of its recommendations; I welcome particularly the two recommendations which appear to address the problems that we see with British Rail's current, rather cavalier promotion of private Bills in relation to the Channel tunnel link.

7.15 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) on his speech and on discovering how politically sexy private Bills can be. Certainly they will be with regard to the matter that he has just discussed. It will ring through Parliament for the next year or so. I discovered that political fact somewhat earlier. That is why I volunteered to go on Committees on private Bills soon after being elected in 1983. I believed that it was time well spent, which is not something that I can say about my other parliamentary activities since 1983. No doubt Conservative Members will agree with those sentiments.

I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for the New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson), as a member of his Committee, on the way that he chaired it with great patience and skill. I have already told him that I thoroughly enjoyed being on the Committee. I considered it a privilege. It was another useful learning process. It gave us a chance to examine procedures and issues away from the hurly-burly of the Floor of the House, although there is not a great deal of hurly-burly today. This is a good, constructive debate. When one gets involved in sharp political exchanges, there is a great deal of heat but little light is revealed. In the work that I did on the Joint Committee I found that being on the Select Committee on Procedure and on the Standing Orders Committee was a useful complement. May I again say that I thoroughly enjoyed the work and was grateful for the opportunity to serve on the Joint Committee.

The debate is most welcome but I still feel that it is belated. The report was published in October 1988. I, with others, have pushed the Leader of the House at business questions on many occasions to say when we would have a debate. His answers, always courteous, were to the effect that the Government were studying the report and were considering their response. It was commendable so to do because it is a big fat report with a lot of good reading in it, but it would have been a reasonable response from the Leader of the House if the debate had enabled us to vote on something.

I had to leave the House for part of the speech of the Leader of the House. I should like to find out from him whether a date has yet been fixed for a substantive, executive debate when we can vote. That is the important thing in the end. Many of us spend much time and energy on Committees which bring forward considered recommendations and then there is only a take note debate and the House does not have an opportunity to say how it feels by voting. The Leader of the House said on several occasions that he would let the House express its decision.

[Mr. Tony Banks]

That can be done only by voting. When will we be allowed to vote? I have tried to resist becoming over-cynical or suspicious in the House——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Don't.

Mr. Banks: I take the point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says, it is something that one should not do. I am trying to be as generous to the Leader of the House as I can, but I always listen closely to the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover.

I am forced to conclude that the delay is because the Leader of the House and, therefore, the Government do not want these recommendations in situ prior to the Kent Bill coming before the House in the next Session.

Mr. Wakeham: I rise to intervene in a spirit of friendliness towards the hon. Gentleman, because the debate has been interesting. Judging by one or two of the interventions, something that might be called the "Newham question" appears to be emerging. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) are miles apart in their thinking about the way in which we should go forward. I shall be interested to see how that debate develops.

Mr. Banks: That is certainly not true. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) is disagreeing very much with what the Leader of the House has just said. My hon. Friend and I always go together in the closest possible political and personal sympathy. I assure the Leader of the House that that is as true on this matter as on others.

Mr. Moate: I thought that what the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) was saying was diametrically opposed. Even if that were true, does he agree that that is no reason why the House should not vote on the proposition? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Banks: I am taking my cue from my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South. I was going to say that perhaps I will read his speech with more interest, but I could not have more interest in what he says. I shall read his speech carefully, but I do not see that we are in any way apart on this matter. In the end, although he and I might have our differences on the various recommendations, they will be differences of only a minor degree and I am sure that we are together in saying that the House must have an early opportunity to vote on those recommendations.

Mr. Spearing: I am glad that my hon. Friend has given way, because perhaps I can clarify the matter. His having been a member of the Committee and party, to some extent, to the detailed recommendations, may hide the fact that we are at one in our wish to adjust the procedures for private business towards modern demands. The routes that we may take to minimise the abuses and the difficulties may be different, but those are our objectives. Like my hon. Friend I look forward to substantive changes in the Standing Orders and the arrangements, although I acknowledge that this sort of debate facilitates the changes to be made—and the sooner the better.

Mr. Banks: I am sure that I agree entirely with everything that my hon. Friend has said.

If we are to set up Select Committees or special Committees, after taking time to reflect and to read the report of the Joint Committee, the House should be given an opportunity to vote. That is all I am saying, but I hope that when the Leader of the House replies to the debate he will tell us when we will have the opportunity to vote.

There will always be a role for private Bills, but, as the report clearly stresses, there have been a large number of private Bills before the House this Session—I believe that the hon. Member for New Forest said that there had been 58—many which have been or are highly controversial. The Committee felt that there was a general desire to reduce the number of private Bills coming before the House and that, as far as possible, some of the more controversial aspects of those Bills should be eliminated. I thoroughly support recommendation 1.

There was a general belief in the Joint Committee, as there is in the House and—just as important—outside the House that private Bills are being used to bypass public inquiry procedures. The most blatant example of that was the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill. The House should not tolerate that. The Committee has recognised the fact and even before we have a vote the Leader of the House should recognise that the concern is shared by hon. Members of all parties. Therefore, I strongly support recommendations 5 and 13.

Parliament is being used—I stress the word "used"—by promoters to fast-track developments and, in certain cases, to override the great weight of public opinion which is often against the more controversial proposals contained in private Bills. The House is not an appropriate or satisfactory alternative to a planning inquiry when local communities and local amenities are affected by proposals.

The private Bill procedure requires that hon. Members who serve on an opposed Bill Committee should declare that they have no constituency interest. Obviously, that is right, but it could be only a short step removed from their having no interest whatsover. I am not being critical but some hon. Members who serve on a private Bill Committee simply wish to get out of it as fast as they possibly can. Many of us who work on Committees know that the work does not attract the media attention given to work on the Floor of the House. When one serves on a Standing Committee, it is like disappearing into a legislative black hole; but on private Bill Committees, it is like going for a long walk through a desert, never to be heard of again until the Bill finally comes back to the House—and even then no one pays very much attention to it. Although the Bills may be important—I am not denigrating the importance of the issues that are discussed —serving on private Bill Committees will not achieve much for hon. Members who like their work at least to be noted. We must try to sweeten or to give a few temptations to hon. Members who might want to continue to serve —as I do—on Committees on private Bills.

It can be a problem if hon. Members who serve on a Private Bill Committee have only a little if any local knowledge of the issue confronting them. Of course, hon. Members may at least acquaint themselves with the locality by visiting the area affected by the Bill, but frankly, that is no substitute for having some detailed local knowledge similar to that of the local authorities and the local people. Indeed, as far as possible, important decisions should be taken in the areas where the decisions will have the most impact. That is what "devolution" means in political terms. In many ways, private Bills argue

wholly against political devolution and decision making. In addition, hon. Members who serve on private Bill Committees often have inadequate expertise in planning matters. Such expertise would assist them to make a proper assessment.

The evidence that has been submitted by the Council for the Protection of Rural England and by the Ramblers Association stresses—and I agree—that it is difficult for local people and communities to voice their objectives within the private Bill procedure. I have chaired a number of Committees on private Bills and agree that it is quasi-judicial procedure which can be intimidating to people who come along to try to represent the interests of their small communities, organisations or even themselves, as they are entitled so to do. It is not just a question of standing up and giving evidence. Individuals or their representatives, who can be amateurs not professionals, can be cross-examined by expensive leading counsel, which is not something that many people find enjoyable. Therefore, the process can be intimidatory and that aspect should be eliminated. I remind the Leader of the House that the promoters of private Bills can afford the most expensive legal representation for the Committee stage. As so often, the more money one has, the more law one can buy. We must be mindful of that fact when we consider the report's recommendations.

Private Bills are even more inappropriate for schemes involving massive infrastructure investment with strategic implications. When there are strategic and even national implications, I do not see how a Private Bill Committee can be the appropriate forum to consider the proposals. Indeed, I do not know whether a Private Bill Committee could be allowed to consider such strategic implications. That will certainly be true of the King's Cross Railways Bill and of the "fast routes through Kent" Bill that we will have next Session.

I join the hon. Members of all parties who believe that these private Bills are back to front. It seems nonsense to have a Bill that decides where the terminal will be before a Bill that sets out the route because the location of the terminal will go a long way to pre-empt the decision on the route. That cannot be good for Parliament and it cannot be good for the strategic transport implications presented by such private Bills.

I believe that such Bills as the King's Cross Railways Bill and the "fast routes through Kent" Bill should be public Bills. If we cannot have them as public Bills, there should be full public inquiries where the strategic implications can be rehearsed.

I am still shocked that the Government have abdicated any responsibility for strategic planning and transportation matters. I was glad to see the Secretary of State for Transport here a little while ago. A couple of weeks ago he came to a meeting of the London group of Labour Members, which I chair. I pointed out to him that I met British Rail and said, "Look, the King's Cross terminal is a matter of strategic importance for London and the south-east." British Rail's response was, "We are not the strategic authority for transport for London or the south-east. We are a commercial transport undertaking. This is a matter for the Government." I then said to the Secretary of State for Transport, "You are, surely Secretary of State, the strategic transport authority." As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South said, it shocked us that the Secretary of State said, "I am not the strategic authority." In that case, who is the strategic authority? The answer is that there is none, which cannot be good for the future planning of transportation matters in this country.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend has illustrated that the opinion of Conservative Members was already prejudiced. My hon. Friend is absolutely in parallel with what I was saying. Does my hon. Friend not understand that the situation in London is even worse? I received recently a written answer from the Secretary of State for Transport saying that he certainly was not responsible for planning public transport in London, but that that responsibility lay with London Regional Transport. That does not fill me with any confidence.

Mr. Banks: It appears that the Government, especially the Prime Minister, want to interfere with the daily affairs of everyone—in particular the local councils—but do not want to take the strategic overview. Perhaps that is the nature of the busybody rather than of the person with the imagination to look at something on a broader canvas. For transportation that attitude is appalling. All sorts of disconnected decisions are being taken, which spell disaster, and certainly enormous difficulties, for transportation policy. That appears to be the nature of the beast we are dealing with in government today. It is not good for transportation and will not be good for the country as a whole.

Mr. Skinner: Of course, there is another way of looking at it, which is that the Government have their legislative programme anyway. That is chock-bang full of measures that will redistribute the balance of wealth and power in Britain. If, however, the Government wanted to introduce a Bill on transport or the Associated British Ports Bill, they could use the private Bill procedure as an addendum to their own legislative programme. At the same time, they have the added advantage of being able to say when they are passed, "Really, you know, they were free votes." They can say, "Hands off, it's nothing to do with us," but at the same time, in addition to their own programme, they have got through some of the things that they wanted as well. That is why, on that ports Bill, the Prime Minister turned up at 10 o'clock at night in her carpet slippers to vote it through.

Mr. Banks: As ever, I agree 100 per cent. with my hon. Friend. I shall be coming on to the second part of my objection to private Bill procedure, which concerns the highly controversial nature of some of those Bills.

On the strategic role of certain private Bills, recommendations 5 and 13 will at least go some way to answering my worries about the way that things are being done at present. They are the ones that will involve a public inquiry and an environmental impact assessment to be attached. That is necessary, because they appear to be inappropriate matters for the Private Bill Committee to consider. If the Committee had to take into account all those other matters, it would only extend the period in which it considers the Private Bill Committee stage. It is onerous enough for Members as it is, without adding more and more to the responsibilities and burdens that they should not have to shoulder, in many cases do not want to shoulder and, as I have said, they do not, perhaps, have the skills to shoulder.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover mentioned the controversial nature of a number of private Bills. At

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times it is clear that the private Bill is being used by the Government to further their political objectives. Hon. Members must recognise that this makes nonsense of the private Bill procedure. The Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill and the two Humber Bills are good examples. It was clear that what we were really talking about was the dock labour scheme, the Government's battle with the National Union of Mineworkers and their energy policy. We are aware enough to realise that that is really what was going on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said that the Prime Minister turned up in her carpet slippers for the vote on the ports Bill. She did so because she recognised that that Bill was crucial to Government policies. It was dishonest of the Government to push those matters through under the private Bill procedure. It should have been done openly through the public Bill procedure, when they could have openly used their majority and the payroll vote, rather than doing it surreptitiously.

Another convention that is being ridden over roughshod by the Government is that there is now whipping on private Bills. I agree that there might not be any official whipping on private Bills. However, if the Leader of the House were willing to put his hand on his heart—assuming that he could find it easily enough—and say that, when he was the Government Chief Whip, he never became involved or never sent his assistants out to ensure that hon. Members turned up to vote on some of those Bills, I should be prepared to give way. However, I suspect that he would not want to mislead the House by making such a statement.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: It is done in more subtle ways. One does not put a Whip on the private business, but a three-line Whip is put on an order that comes on afterwards. Then one has done the same thing.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is a very sophisticated Member and would make an excellent Whip. Of course there are ways of doing it. Another way of doing it would be to say to hon. Members, "The Prime Minister would consider this to be a particular favour. The Prime Minister would like to see you voting for this Bill. There are a few tricks coming up. Don't forget the new year's honours list is being drawn up at this very moment." As my hon. Friend has said, there are more subtle ways of doing it.

Mr. Wakeham: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that all these tricks have suddenly been learnt since 1979 and have never been thought of before?

Mr. Banks: I am not that naive. I have always been a critic of the overweening power of Prime Ministers and, I might add, of Leaders of the Opposition. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman will catch me out with a question like that.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Let us put all the cards on the table, because I remember a debate that we had on a Friday concerning an amendment introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) to the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill. The Government whipped in every Minister to vote it down. Normally, we have Ministers only at the Dispatch Box to answer the debate. On that occasion, nearly every Minister was whipped in —no doubt by the Prime Minister—to vote the amendment down.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I am sure that the Bill on the disabled was not a private Bill.

Mr. Hardy: There is another aspect of the Government's approach to private Bills on which my hon. Friend might like to comment. That concerns the Bills with substantial environmental content, where the Government agencies—the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission—petitioned against the Bill and advised the Minister, who is not the Minister with whom they deal and who bears that responsibility, to oppose the Bill. I have seen environmental Ministers, who have received the advice of Government agencies after pronouncing the Government's neutrality, eagerly leading their troops through the Lobby in favour of the Bill.

Mr. Banks: They are yet further examples of the way in which the private Bill procedure has moved into areas of great political controversy. It would be far better for the business of the House if, as far as possible, such Bills were taken out of the private Bill procedure and dealt with as openly and as honestly as possible.

I am sure that such problems have arisen in the past, but in recent years they appear to have arisen more frequently, and that is not good for the private Bill procedure. Bills that are controversial for political or environmental reasons would be more appropriately considered as public Bills rather than through the private Bill procedure.

I support recommendation 16 which deals with the carrying over of Bills from one Session to the next. As the hon. Member for New Forest said, the ability to have Bills carried over gives additional power to the promoters. That power presupposes that, merely because a Bill is before the House, it should be carried over on the nod. I believe that it would concentrate the minds of some promoters if we did not accede to the request to carry over such Bills formally. I believe that we should bounce a few back. We all have our favourite candidates; I have already nominated mine, but only time will tell.

When I have chaired Private Bill Committees I have often found that the proceedings have become lengthy because counsel seems to be on a payment-by-word basis. It is assumed that Committee members cannot even read and the papers that have already been put before the Committee are gone through word by word. I believe that the Chairman of such a Committee should make it clear that there is no need to go through the documents and should say, "Look, I am capable of reading. Please pass on."

If the promoter happens to be a local authority I am always aware just how much the whole thing is costing the ratepayers. If the promoter is British Rail, I am aware of the cost to the taxpayer. The corollary to that is how much it costs the poor old petitioner. An individual may come to the House for a couple of days to voice some objection, but is forced to sit through interminable hours of counsel reading through masses of documents. Counsel clock up extremely fat fees and I should remind them that they are paid at a far higher rate than the rest of us. I am anxious to get value for money for the taxpayer and the ratepayer.

Recommendation 39 deals with costs. In Committee I pushed hard for costs to the promoter to be substantially increased. The rates we are recommending are only marginal in comparison to the overall costs to be faced by the promoter when paying for a development. When we are talking about mega-million or multi-billion pound projects, £2,500 or £5,000 is the sort of money that developers no doubt carry in their back pockets. If anything, I believe that the Committee has erred on the side of conservatism in terms of the money that we could get out of some promoters.

It is also worth considering the idea of a formal panel of Members appointed to opposed Bill Committees. I listened with great interest to the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, who said that serving on the panel could be an apprenticeship for the Chairmen's Panel. We all know that once one is on that panel one is on the way to the Chair of the House and the coveted full-bottomed wig, which is apparently desired by many Members.

I recognise that those who serve on Committees, whether Standing Committees or Private Bill Committees, are the true Stakhanovites of Parliament. Some modest reward should be given to them. I do not know whether that should be a knighthood, a damehood or whatever. If such an honour were offered to me I would renounce it immediately and ask for it to be transferred to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover.

We must recognise the work of members of all Committees—that work is essential to the business of the House. In many respects it is unrecognised and unacknowledged. I found working on the Committee chaired by the hon. Member for New Forest extremely interesting. I find working on private Bills interesting, but I believe that such work would be made far less onerous if we reduced the number of Bills and eliminated those that are politically or environmentally controversial.

The report is good—I am not saying that merely because I was a member of that Committee—and it contains many suggestions that should be implemented. I hope that the Leader of the House will give us an opportunity to vote on the recommendations as soon as possible.

7.44 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I listened to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) with great interest. I thought that it was a pity that, given his chameleon-like nature, he could not decide whether he was trying to make a useful and constructive contribution to a sensible debate or whether he would rather have been haranguing a full House with a rowdy and rumbustious speech about building a railway line, with a three-line Whip and Divisions all night.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) on a most remarkable report. I feel rather hesitant in speaking because I have not had the honour of serving on a private Bill Committee. I was listed to do so, but, fortunately for my diary, the opponents managed to settle their differences and the Committee was never called.

For some time I have been trying to introduce a private Bill to help my constituents who have a problem regarding the protection of a covenant dating back to 1934. I note that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning is present and he is aware of that problem. My constituents would like me to organise a delegation to visit him about it.

I declare a natural interest in this subject as I am an engineer. It is no accident that the headquarters of the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers are on the other side of Parliament square. I am a fellow of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. I regret that I cannot stay for the entire debate because of a prior engagement at the Institution of Civil Engineers.

The thrust of the report is that the principal purpose of private Bills is to get things done. I support the recommendations for modernising and improving the private Bill procedure. Recommendation 13 relates to the impact on the environment of a particular Bill. I believe that that recommendation, together with the recommendation to publish a handbook to make the complex mystery of such Bills more understandable to the public, will mean that private Bills will be introduced not so much to get things done as to stop things being done.

My constituents are anxious that a covenant which was entered into in 1934 and which was designed to protect some open land from being built on, should now be flouted. Only last week a large national rapacious builder announced his intention to start building within the next few days, despite the existence of the covenant and despite the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State refused to discharge the covenant when asked to do so. In future, constituents will demand a simplified procedure for bringing forward private Bills to protect their interests.

I am doubtful about some of the recommendations, as I believe that they will make it more difficult for people to introduce such Bills. Fees at a minimum level of £10,000 represent such a difficulty. I note that it is recommended that there should be a remission of costs to protect charities. I am not sure how far the Committee considers that protection should go, but perhaps I will get that answer tonight.

Today I received a letter from the Bolton civic trust asking me to raise in Parliament how the covenant could be protected. Would the trust be able to bring in a private Bill and expect to be given remission of the large fees proposed? If that were so I would find it easier to accept that part of the report.

Another part of the report which fills me with horror relates to the rigid timetable. To have only one day in the year—I believe that it is 27 October—to introduce a private Bill is an impossible way to proceed. That is a classic example of a monopolistic bureaucracy, which this House is, coming up against the desires of people to bring in private Bills. People should not be told, "I'm sorry, you've missed the deadline by a few days and you'll now have to wait a year before you can bring in a private Bill to protect your case." I hope that the Committee will consider that point further.

The report addresses the needs of big business. It is clear that big business should have the right procedures to bring forward private Bills properly, and we know that that happens with the railways and the docks. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that we should also make it easier for small groups which in the past have looked to the local authority to protect them. In the case to which I have referred, a covenant needed protection. With regard to that covenant, in 1981 the local authority said that steps had been taken to effect registration so that

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the agreement would be enforceable. However, counsel for Barratts, which also has interests in Dulwich, has said that its legal advice is that it can flout the covenant. People may look to the council to protect them and then find that the council fails them.

If people are concerned about the strength of a covenant and if they want to rest comfortably in their beds at night, they must know that if there is any doubt they can bring a private Bill through to ensure that the covenant is reinforced by the House. I hope that the Committee will consider that when it further considers the report which I otherwise support fully.

7.51 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I will not follow the course pursued by the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) very far. He showed considerable ingenuity in raising a problem in his constituency. However, the whole advantage of having to present private Bills on one day in the year is that it makes it far easier for objectors to analyse a Bill to see what it involves. I often speak on behalf of the Ramblers Association in the House. If it did not know on which day a Bill was to be presented, it would face a formidable task in obtaining a copy to check whether footpath interests were affected.

One of the most challenging issues for a democracy is to persuade individuals that they should accept personal sacrifices for the benefit of the majority of their fellow citizens or, in some cases, for the benefit of the minority. It is even harder if people are asked to make sacrifices when they know that someone else will make a profit.

Someone may want to build a new power station, running on any kind of fuel, at the bottom of someone's garden. Similarly, a new motorway may cross the corner of someone's back yard or a railway line may cross someone's patio. There may be a new public lavatory on a street corner or a municipal refuse incinerator in a field at the back of a house. There may be a proposal for a gipsy encampment within half a mile of someone's home. In all those cases, I suspect that, if people were in favour of them at all, they would be in favour of them somewhere else and not close to their homes. I wonder whether we can produce any procedure which would convince people that such proposals should go ahead close to their houses.

It is even more difficult to produce procedures which will safeguard the environment against the immediate public and private expediency of damaging it. It would be very difficult to produce any procedure which would convince people that they have had a fair hearing if the decision goes against them. It will be even harder to convince future generations that we have done our planning well when they consider the environmental damage which we have already inflicted on this country.

It is very difficult to find a procedure which is genuinely fair to people who would be disadvantaged by such a decision. I am absolutely certain that the present private Bill procedure is grossly unfair. We should be able to find a fairer and better system.

The procedures are heavily weighted in favour of a Bill's promoter and are heavily weighted against those who want to object, particularly when individuals do not have great resources or find it difficult to raise money to make representations. Anyone who goes down the Corridors and enters the House of Lords to witness the proceedings on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill will realise what difficulties are involved.

A very affluent body is promoting the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill and it has no difficulty in bringing its expert witnesses up from south Wales and engaging Queen's counsel to make the case. However, the individual objectors in the area face the expense of travelling here. When they arrive, they may find that there has been a slight alteration in the timetable, a QC may have spoken longer or shorter than expected or the individual may have come up on the wrong day and may be required to come up again the following day. Such people face many problems. Even the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is almost in despair at having to organise and marshal opposition to that private Bill.

I have seen many private Bills pass through this House since I became a Member in 1974. These have included county council Bills and regular British Rail Bills. We should link waterways Bills with those British Rail Bills, although they do not come up quite as often. Many of those Bills have caused a great deal of environmental damage. In many ways, that legislation has involved the worst side of politics, with blackmail, bribery and many chance occurrences. I recall one Bill which failed by a single vote to gain the majority necessary for a closure. Obviously, no one can plan for that. All forms of jiggery-pokery have occurred in private legislation. That is not new: those political processes have occurred throughout the centuries in connection with private business.

We should remember that private business in the past took up much more time than it does now. The burghers of Northampton worked hard for nearly 10 years to prevent a railway line from going through the town and ever afterwards tried to get the railway line put through the town. Those of us who have studied railway history will be aware that various lords negotiated with the railway companies for their own private stations with guarantees that trains would stop. Only once such concession were granted did the lords allow the railway lines to cross their land.

There is nothing new about the shenanigans that have occurred in private Bill legislation. However, we should change things in this day and age. When the Town and Country Planning Act was passed in 1947, the House should have considered private Bill legislation very carefully and taken out most of the planning elements from the private Bill procedure.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend is making a very interesting speech, much of which I agree with. Does he agree that his concept is consistent with the concept that I put forward in my speech—that any private Bill would have to satisfy a Committee of this House that public inquiry procedures had been followed properly? An inspector would probably make a report to the House rather than to the Secretary of State on matters requiring legislation rather than report on matters in the present way.

Mr. Bennett: I accept that. I do not think that there is a fundamental difference between my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and the Committee. The Committee says that a lot less should be

done through private Bills. My hon. Friend says almost that his total case is based on the first recommendation and that the others are subsidiary. The Committee says that the first recommendation is the most important and that the others follow. I do not think that there is a great deal of difference. My fundamental point is that this proposal for reform should have come with the new planning legislation after the second world war.

I welcome very much the work that the Committee did, and I pay tribute to the Chairman and the other members. However, I stress that what they have produced is a package. If all their proposals were implemented, most of the groups outside with which I have contact would be very happy. But those people would be very disappointed if only some of the proposals were implemented. If we were to get the balance right by reducing the number of environmental Bills, planning Bills, and things of that kind, the other changes to Standing Orders would be acceptable. But those changes would be totally unacceptable if the recommendations and those that follow from them are not right.

That is why I found the Government's response extremely disappointing. It suggested, almost, that this whole report could be buried for some time and that perhaps they would pick out two or three little points as a sop to the Committee and to the House. That would be totally unacceptable.

The Leader of the House referred to the sovereignty of Parliament. He seemed to suggest that if we were to go down this planning road we would get rid of the sovereignty of Parliament. In the case of the Channel tunnel, the railway line through Kent, and the King's Cross issue, the Government should have introduced legislation setting out the principle that there would be a Channel tunnel and a high-speed link, and that there would be either a London terminus or, as I prefer, a terminus much nearer the midlands to ensure that the whole country would benefit. Those principles should have been set out in Government legislation, and there should have been an inquiry to establish the route. In that way various people could have put forward the alternative arguments.

As I understand it, the King's Cross Railways Bill is a total farce. The London terminus will be established, and the tunnel will be under construction, so two points are set, and the piece between has to be filled in. No one could imagine that the route will be via Manchester or Belfast. As the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) made clear, his constituents will not be able to appear as objectors to the King's Cross Railways Bill, because they are not, as I understand the Standing Orders, directly affected. Of course they are not directly affected. I am not quite sure what will happen to the people of Newham, who would like to argue that Stratford should have been chosen instead of King's Cross. I am not sure whether those people will be entitled to appear. By a very strict and narrow interpretation of the Standing Orders, they have nothing to do with King's Cross.

Mr. Tony Banks: I can tell my hon. Friend straight away that the promoters, British Rail, have challenged the locus of Newham borough council. The matter went before the Court of Referees, which found against Newham. We will not be able to petition against the Bill unless we can attach an instruction at Second Reading, which is something that I intend to do. Paragraph 101 of the report says:

> "Proceedings over *locus standi* are uncommon. In the House of Lords, 36 challenges to *locus standi* have been recorded since 1950; in the House of Commons, the Court of Referees has considered only 11 cases since 1977."

British Rail is making up for lost ground: it has challenged over 150.

Mr. Bennett: I understand that. All that I am suggesting is that using the private Bill procedure is ridiculous. What we ought to have is a planning inquiry, at which people could argue for an alternative route and alternative termini. When the inquiry has been completed—some people suggest that the recommendations should be made to the House; others that the recommendations should be made to the Minister—orders, or a short Bill, could go through the House implementing them. That is the procedure that should be adopted.

I do not believe that by accepting the report the House would be giving up any sovereignty at all, and I am disappointed that the Leader of the House made that point.

In an intervention, I stressed to the Leader of the House that he should make very sure that there would be no more jumbo Bills. Recommendation 10 is extremely important —that Government Departments do not use private legislation as a short cut for provisions that they have failed to get through the Cabinet legislative committee.

It seems to me important that carry over motions should be debated at the start of the new Parliament. A new group of Members must be able to pass judgment as quickly as possible on the principle. I welcome the proposal concerning environmental impact. It is extremely important that it should be implemented.

I welcome the reforms—so long as we get them in balance. If there are no local government Bills, if the new procedure for British Rail Bills and others introduced by the waterways authority and if planning matters can be dealt with by planning inquiries, it seems to me that the other changes are acceptable.

On the question of having six names, it has been pointed out that at least one Bill has only my name on it. That is the requirement at the moment, but, if necessary, I think I could find five Friends in the House to add their names. Then I could start to argue. There is one thing that causes me to hesitate. On occasions I have put my name on the block and then started to talk to other people, who add their names. If eventually I accepted that a deal has to be done and I have to take my name off, I might find that others have stronger resolve than myself. So that creates a few difficulties.

On the question of 100 Members having to vote for a closure, the real question is the extent to which the Government whip the business. This has been referred to in an exchange. The days named for private business procedure are an amazing affair. I am told that the Chairman of Ways and Means has total discretion and can choose exactly for which day business is put down. Afterwards, the Government have the choice whether to put an order down and use the Whip. Sometimes, a private Bill arrives, and there is nothing after it. One thinks that that is a hint from the Government that they do not mind if it disappears, and a hint from the Chairman of Ways and Means that he does not mind if it disappears. On other

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occasions the Chairman of Ways and Means picks a night when he is pretty confident that there will be other business either that day or the next. It is a very interesting process.

I do not think that it makes a lot of difference if we move to a simple majority for the closure if it reduces some of the behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, particularly if the rest of the package were implemented. I suspect that, if we were to vote on the principle, there would be more chance of people coming and listening to the debate on a private Bill and voting on its merits rather than as a result of pressure from behind the scenes such as, "It does not matter what you do tonight. Don't take any interest in the debate, but please be here at 10 o'clock for the vote." I would not object to that so long as it is part of the package.

The Committee recommends that there should be five Members instead of four. I have always felt that, in equity, it is not a good idea to have four people hearing evidence, because the Chairman, in return for performing his duties, gets two votes. At the moment chairmanships are supposed to alternate. The Opposition get one, and next time the Government get it. Obviously in the case of Bills that are party political, the order in which parties occupy the chairmanship makes an awful lot of difference.

I have been trying to find out what really happens and how easy it is for promoters to manipulate their Bill so that it comes in such a position in the queue that they get a Chairman who might be sympathetic to their case. That is another of those mysterious processes that go on in the House. I shall not go into that, but I want to know what will happen if we move from four to five members. Will there always be three Government and two Opposition members or will selection still be on a fairly random basis, and who will be the Chairman? If the Government have an in-built majority and always provide the chairman that would be going a little further than I would wish. I want more information on that.

I welcome most of the other proposals, but I want to reiterate the point already made by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on behalf of the ramblers who object strongly to the proposal for the closure of public footpaths on the basis of safety. At present, under highways legislation and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, people can move for the diversion of a footpath where necessary on safety and other grounds and for closure where a footpath is not used. It is a little much for British Rail to say that it wants to close footpaths on the basis of safety. I do not want people to be injured, but since British Rail is creating the problem it is reasonable that it should find some way of getting under or over a crossing by an underpass or a bridge unless it can demonstrate that the crossing is not used. If people do not use it, legislation exists to close it and British Rail does not need this statutory power. It is not an acceptable ground for British Rail to argue that, because it has speeded up trains or carried out other engineering work on the line, a crossing is not safe. That is my one strong caveat.

I end by emphasising that if all the measures are recommended by the Government for implementation, I will go along with that. But if the Government want to pick out only one or two measures which further swing the balance in favour of the promoters, I shall ensure that those proposals are fought line by line.

8.11 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Thinking about the debate today reminded me of some lines that I always remember with pleasure, although perhaps I should not, spoken by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) when he was the newly appointed Secretary of State for Employment:

> "I seem to recall that the right hon. Gentleman was the father of the Industrial Relations Act. The Queen's Speech proposes to repeal that Act. Never was a father so impassive in the face of the prospective slaughter of his pride and joy." —[*Official Report*, 18 March 1974; Vol. 870, c. 688.]

Many of us remember that debate with pleasure.

I had feared that today something which many of us feel some pride in might be slaughtered, perhaps not openly and blatantly, but by some subtle parliamentary means. I have a sense of parentage, albeit with a large number of other strange bedfellows, and a sense of pride in the report that emerged.

I do not wish to be repetitive or platitudinous, but this is the only chance that we have to put on record our appreciation. I want to record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson), the Committee's Chairman, who was outstanding and to whom we all owe a great debt of gratitude. In particular, I want to take the opportunity to place on record my compliments to the Clerks of the Committee, particularly Mr. Andrew Makower and Miss Elizabeth Baker. It allows one to say again just how well served we are in this House by the remarkable Clerks. Mr. Makower and Miss Baker were of the highest standard, combining a great deal of knowledge and intellect with charm. They had a skill of pilotage without appearing to do the steering. Those are remarkable qualities that are not always present in all one's colleagues, at least until they reach the Chair or become Patronage Secretary.

It was a great pleasure to serve on the Committee. Many hon. Members have said that it is a pleasure to serve on private Bill Committees. That is true and it was a privilege and pleasure to serve on this Committee. It has been fascinating to hear how many other people have brought an expertise and objectivity to our discussions today, and that is the point that I want to begin on.

The Committee was as impartial and objective as such a diverse Committee could be. We did not start off with any preconceptions and many of the conclusions that we have put before the House were arrived at by a logical process of listening to the witnesses. We came to some major and radical conclusions which have received almost overwhelming support from the House, and I hope that they will be accepted in that light.

It has been suggested that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was somewhat negative, but that is not fair. He expressed an open-minded approach to some of the major propositions. He said that he would listen to the debate, and it is significant and heartening that virtually every contribution, coming from some significant sources, has virtually endorsed the whole range of the proposals. By significant, I certainly mean the shadow Leader of the House. Endorsements from the Opposition Front and Back Benches are of great importance. It is even more significant to have the immensely welcome contribution of the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, which was encouraging, positive and helpful and should give a fair wind to many of the proposals.

If my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House had any doubts beforehand about the fundamental issues, I hope that he will take on board the opinions that have been expressed and come back with positive action, which means votes, much sooner than would otherwise have been the case. My right hon. Friend was most open-minded and helpful. Nevertheless, we are making some radical proposals.

I do not wish to go over the whole report. Other hon. Members can pick out individual matters. I want to restrict myself to the key issues. The first objective is the need to remove from the House many matters which, in the light of modern planning procedures, should not be in Parliament at all. Secondly, I want to deal with some of the more procedural matters and, thirdly, to deal with the tantalising matter of King's Cross and the rail link which is so crucial to our debate. In some ways it is regrettable to relate such general procedural proposals to highly controversial issues. It is said that hard cases make bad law and we should be careful. On the other hand, it is useful to test what we are discussing against real life issues which bring home to our constituents and hon. Members who might not otherwise be listening to our debate the realities and importance of the private Bill proposals.

Let me start with the objective of removing from our parliamentary procedures matters that we describe as public works Bills which would be better dealt with outside the legislature. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) exposed the real nature of the argument. The Committee came down clearly in favour of the public inquiry procedure. My position on that is clear, particularly in relation to the Kent problem of today. We said that the public inquiry route is better than the parliamentary route; that applies to those highway matters which come before Parliament, railway matters, harbour matters and tramways and other related matters.

The hon. Member for Newham, South clearly expressed his anxiety that Parliament would be losing some power over major planning decisions. We do not try to control through the legislature most of the major planning decisions that affect our constituents, and none of us would want to. Logic says that we should apply those planning rules to other matters, such as the railways, and in our report we produce a clear, precise and practical set of proposals that would take those matters back into the planning domain.

That would require primary legislation. I accept that there is always a queue for such legislation and that it is not a small commitment to ask the Government to introduce legislation of that sort, the ramifications of which could be considerable. But I am encouraged to believe that my right hon. Friend implied that it would be introduced at some stage. He seemed to accept the principle of our suggestions.

We must accept that there will be a loss of parliamentary control over some planning matters; a sacrifice will be made by certain hon. Members who will no longer be able to debate issues into which they used to enjoy getting their teeth. Those matters will leave the House.

The next point to be understood by objectors is that it will not necessarily produce a different or better result, but I believe that the planning inquiry route is the right route and is a better system for objectors. It is certainly a more congenial way of putting one's case. There are not strict rules of locus, so more people can put their cases; it is more democratic. Nevertheless, they will put their cases before just one inspector. He or she will make a report to the Secretary of State and there will be a reasoned explanation of the decision. That will be taken as an Executive decision.

Mr. Wolfson: It is said in the report that going down the planning route, as the Committee proposes, is likely to be a much slower process than the present procedure. Will my hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Moate: I will come to the question of speed. While I believe that the planning route is not only the right but the better route, I do not want people to think that our present procedures are all bad or that private Bills that are going through or will go through before we have changed the system are necessarily prejudicial to the petitioners or opponents of Bills, because there are advantages.

To pursue the point of the King's Cross or Channel high-speed rail link proposal, it is not impossible—we are all speculating—that hon. Members and others who are opposed to the King's Cross proposal might be able to achieve an instruction to the Committee that could change the nature of the Bill. Indeed, they might be able to defeat the Bill. They might certainly be able, through the usual parliamentary tactics, to achieve major amendments to the Bill. It could be argued that none of those would have been available through the planning system.

Equally, if by chance the King's Cross Railways Bill were defeated by the opponents, they might say, "We prefer the parliamentary procedure to the planning system." At the same time, British Rail and the Department, if they were backing it, might say, "What a pity we had the parliamentary procedure. We would have preferred the public inquiry route." It all depends on the ultimate decision, and the sheer satisification of being able to take up more time at a public inquiry is not the be-all and end-all of the system.

Our present system is fair, but it is illogical and these matters should be put into the planning system. The Joint Committee, having examined it, came down clearly and firmly in favour of that proposition. On balance, it would be better for all the relevant organisations outside, as they argued strongly, to go to a planning inquiry.

I have no hesitation in sticking firmly to that proposal and I have no doubt that, had we considered these proposals a year or two ago in relation to, say, King's Cross and the high-speed link, we would now be considering them in the context of the planning system.

The Leader of the House attached great importance to the question of speed and said that the planning procedure would be slower and that would be the price to be paid. I do not think that that is necessarily the case and it seems that the point has been exaggerated. The delays in the planning procedure are not created only by the length of the public inquiry. They are caused as much by the bureaucratic processes before and after it. The inquiry need not be lengthy.

We have new rules that should curtail the excesses that have been experienced as some planning inquiries. There is no fundamental reason why a planning process should not be relatively quick. Who, anyway, is assuming that the parliamentary process will be quick? Judging by the remarks of some opponents, there is no guarantee that the

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King's Cross Railways Bill will whistle through at a rapid rate. It would not surprise me if that takes as long as any alternative planning inquiry would have taken.

Mr. Spearing: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the advantages of the planning inquiry procedure, and I made that clear in my speech. What would he say to the concept that clearing the ground, from the point of view of strategic implications and possibly choice of route at the normal planning stage, should be a precondition of any preliminary procedures in this House, except in the case of a more detailed Bill, the details of most of which would have been thrashed out before it arrived? Would that not achieve the best of both worlds?

Mr. Moate: I would have to consider the hon. Gentleman's proposal carefully before being able to respond. Perhaps he will forgive me, therefore, if I do not respond now.

The report says that, whatever is recommended, nothing can detract from the Government's power to handle big planning matters of national importance in any way they choose. I stress that, because whatever procedures are laid down in this House, the Government of the day, of either complexion, might say that a power station, an airport or a railway line is of such significance that—whether it be by hybrid or private legislation or by special development orders—there are various other routes open. In other words, at various times a Government could decide that matters of such strategic importance should come before the House. Had these recommendations been in place, even on the high-speed link, the Government might have said that the only way to get it through would be to bring it to Parliament.

We have produced a practical and logical set of proposals. They will be for the benefit of the House as a whole and I hope that hon. Members will grasp this nettle, to borrow a phrase from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). If we do not grasp it now, in years to come Parliament will bitterly regret not having taken an opportunity to reconstruct our approach to private Bills that should last us well into the next century.

I will deal briefly with some of the procedural points that are part of the package. I agree with those who have said that it would be wrong to expect hon. Members to give up some of their powers—the opportunities for guerrilla tactics to stop Bills that they do not like—unless they are satisfied that the package adds up.

I hope that the Government business managers will see this as a package—it cannot all be delivered in one piece of legislation—will accept the general objectives, and will introduce primary legislation and the necessary procedural changes to allow what we propose to take place. Only then would it be right to expect hon. Members to give up, for example, the verbal blocking and the need for 100 hon. Members to vote for the closure. I agree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) that, if we took away that need to obtain 100 for the closure, particularly if, at the same time, we made it harder for proposers to carry over a Bill, we might get a genuine debate, because the only requirement would be to achieve a clear majority with 40 hon. Members being present and voting. It would remove an obstacle, but let us not pretend that it would be easy for the proposers.

I welcome the statement by the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means that he thoroughly recommended not the option of a Joint Committee of both Houses for an experimental period but that he thought that it should be a requirement. Having taken a Bill through a Select Committee of one House, it does not make sense to repeat that procedure in the other. That practice was described by one witness as boiling one's cabbages twice. Another referred to it as taking two bites of the cherry. It does not make sense to have a duplication of Select Committees. The Joint Committee proposal is logical and makes sense, and I hope that it will be accepted. If one makes the Joint Committee only an option, it is unlikely to be used by anyone to whom it is inconvenient. I hope that we can, for an experimental period, make a Joint Committee a requirement. I feel sure that we shall benefit as a consequence.

As to the Kent high-speed rail link, I declare an interest as a Member for a Kent constituency. However, I am not directly affected by British Rail's proposal, although I could be directly affected by the proposal for an alternative route through my constituency. Come what may, we are going to have the private Bill procedure in respect of that rail link. the Joint Committee's proposals were brought out without a specific route in mind. Ironically—this makes one realise how quickly events have caught up with us—the report comments:

> "In any case, long stretches of new railway line are at present uncommon."

It is ironic that that statement was made, but that we are now confronted by one of the most highly controversial rail routes of all time.

Whatever our preference may have been, we are on the private Bill route. Speaking personally, my preference was for a public inquiry that embraced the Channel tunnel itself, the rail link, and the link's termini. I wish that some of those who are now complaining the loudest had voted against the Channel tunnel when it was proposed. They did not say then that we should think of the environmental consequences and of the rail link that would be a consequence of the tunnel. However, that is history.

Today I cannot see any conceivable way of persuading the Government to hold a public inquiry. Therefore, we must make the best of the existing procedures, which offer immense opportunities to petitioners to bring their protest to the House and to secure major changes to the Bill. One should also remember the disadvantages of a public inquiry, which generates options and blight across a much wider area. A public inquiry might be presented with four or five main routes, as well as a range of alternative routes, that would be under consideration for six months, a year or even two years. We currently have the advantage that there is only one proposed rail link route, that the whole county is not blighted—and neither are other areas, if one extends the argument—but we have certainty instead. An extended inquiry would delay a decision, and cause massive uncertainty and a great deal of anxiety.

We are, I hope, moving towards the public inquiry system. Assuming that it has the Government's support, that system must be better. The sooner that we adopt it, the better it will be for all concerned. However, for the moment we must make the best use of the procedures that we have.

8.35 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The first part of my speech will not strike a discordant note, but its conclusion may do so. I begin by joining the tributes paid to the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) and to his Committee. The House is indebted to them for their substantial work. I also listened to the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) with great interest. I do not intend remarking much on Kent or on the Channel tunnel, although I suspect that we shall have substantial opportunities to discuss the line of route soon, and at rather greater length.

I am, in common with my hon. Friends, eager to see the proposed changes and the implementation of the whole package in the Joint Committee's report. However, I have reservations about three recommendations. Unlike the hon. Member for New Forest, I am anxious about the question of the simple majority. My belief is that the basic motive behind that proposal is a desire to accelerate consideration of private Bills.

The House is not always wise to accelerate its consideration of Bills. The Felixstowe Docks and Harbour Bill lasted for an unconscionable time between 1985 and 1987. I made long speeches on that Bill, as did several of my hon. Friends, at peculiar hours in the early morning. But as we neared the 50th hour of debate, the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths), who sponsored the Bill, began offering concessions. They may not have amounted to a great deal, but had we not kept the debate going, we should not have obtained them. It is possible that the Orwell estuary would be a poorer place if excessively speedy progress had been made with that Bill.

The House must take care, and right hon. and hon. Members give up hours of their time when they would probably be better off in bed. We must bear in mind the fact that, in addition to the convenience of the lawyers and the interests of commercial undertakings, we are under an obligation to care for the individual who may not have adequate resources to care for himself. We ought to care also for the environment, and I am particularly pleased with the report's reference to environment impact assessments, which right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House will welcome.

Environment impact assessments have been undertaken in recent years in respect of a number of private Bills. The hon. Member for New Forest will recall that a considerable amount of environmental information was available to right hon. and hon. Members concerned about the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill. I even knew how many species of insects there are to be found in the 32 acres plot in contention. As to the Orwell estuary, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds identified not only the breeding species to be found there, but their numbers, together with a considerable amount of other information that was purveyed to the House at rather greater speed than some right hon. and hon. Members would have liked.

We have been given a great deal of environmental information about certain private Bills. All we have now is a promise that assessments will be made. There is no commitment to ensuring that environmental interests notified and presented in assessments will be reflected by the Bill. No guarantee is given that adequate compensation will be paid for any damage that is done.

We welcome the insistence that environmental assessments will be made, but in the absence of a guarantee that any assessment will be made meaningful, a number of right hon. and hon. Members remain justifiably suspicious.

My final anxiety relates to the obligation of a right hon. or hon. Member to attend a Private Bill Committee. A few years ago, such an obligation would have been very reasonable. I shall not labour the point, but some right hon. and hon. Members represent constituencies suffering appalling economic needs, and they could not honourably give a commitment to attend a debate or Committee of the House that is to take place several weeks or months hence. Right hon. and hon. Members do not know whether there will be yet another industrial or colliery closure, or some other form of bankruptcy and ruin in their constituencies. I would not be prepared to enter into such a long-term obligation, and I feel certain that many right hon. and hon. Members representing the industrial areas of the north of England will be anxious about giving such an obligation when the crying need of their constituents, as of mine, may require them to devote their energies, and to ensure their presence, elsewhere.

I shall mention an issue that may not be mentioned in the report. Some of us have expressed concern about two controversial Bills—the Associated British Ports Bill and the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall)—who may seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker—and for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) who served on the Committees on the two Bills. They were unable successfully to introduce an amendment to the Associated British Ports Bill, even though the matter—as I think all Conservative Members recognise—was very contentious. It was so contentious that the European Community would not give grants for the project.

The matter was contentious because it meant that large numbers of jobs in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire would be lost. It was also contentious because it seemed to embody an idiotic approach to energy policy and to destroy industrial capacity, making our balance of payments deficit much greater. However, my hon. Friends were unable to amend the Bill in Committee because they were in a minority. Therefore, the Bill would not be debated on Report. A number of us were very concerned about that.

I raised the matter in the House some weeks ago, because I had a large number of amendments to table in my constituents' interests. However, when I looked at "Erskine May" and checked with our Clerks, I found that there could be only a Third reading, at which hon. Members would be able to present insubstantial verbal amendments. We would not be able to present written amendments, which might have protected thousands of jobs in our area, allowed us to talk about the problems of the unsafe mining industry in South Africa and maintain our saner energy courses. None of those amendments would have been, or will be, possible. That is the single extra rule which needs to be changed, in addition to the commendable ones that are already proposed in the package.

The North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill will proceed to the Report stage because, due to the efforts of my hon. Friends, one amendment was accepted. It is interesting that there are two Bills for two closely adjacent ports, but one will be subject to detailed and lengthy debates on amendments, and the other will not. The promoters of one of those Bills will feel badly done by. I

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am not actually suggesting that we should have a great deal of sympathy with the Bills' promoters. I have very little sympathy with them because it was an abuse to send hon. Members on free trips to South Africa to ensure that they took a slightly rosier view of the Bill than they otherwise might have done.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his detailed exposition of the importance of the two Bills. As both Bills contained matters of great public importance, were they not unsuitable for private legislation?

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is right. I do not dissent from the view that the private Bill procedure was inappropriate in those cases. I made that point clear in a long speech during the debates on one of the Bills. Unfortunately, we have got them, and one of them may not have been properly considered as a consequence of the inadequacy of the present rules.

I shall not take up much more time because several other hon. Members wish to speak and I have made my point. I shall end with another tribute to the hon. Member for New Forest, who has brought to the House a valuable report, which will serve Parliament well for a long time to come. In the interests of the community as well as the individual, the Government must accept the report in its entirety and ensure that the changes that it produces are not embarrassed or blocked by party calculation. On this matter, the will of the House and the need of the nation are similar.

8.45 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I should like to follow the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) with my own broad and warm support for the conclusions of the Joint Committee—that is no mere formality on my part as I am sure it was not for other hon. Members. I join other hon. Members in expressing my warm appreciation to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) and the members of his Committee on a job extremely well done.

The private Bill procedures as has been clearly shown in today's debate, are much in need of a radical overhaul. This is a timely moment for that to be done, given the major and controversial private Bills which are with us and are likely to be with us soon. The House owes a considerable debt to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest and the members of his Committee.

Hon. Members are divided on this matter but the division does not run between the red stripes on the Floor of the House but between those hon. Members who have practical, first-hand experience of the use of private Bill procedures to drive through controversial or unwelcome developments in their own constituencies, and those hon. Members for whom that particular experience is purely theoretical.

We very much appreciate the open-mindedness of the Leader of the House in his opening speech. If his constituency of Colchester, South and Maldon was threatened with having a private Bill being driven through by the private Bill procedures, to dump nuclear waste in landfill sites, he might be a trifle more sceptical about the rights of objectors under private Bill procedures than he was in his opening remarks. Those of us who have such direct constituency experience know that these procedures leave a lot to be desired in giving proper rights of objection to our constituents.

I shall focus on an area which is of concern to us in Kent, south-east London and my own constituency of Tonbridge and Malling—the crucial interaction of private Bill procedures with the planning process. Although we all have planning decisions which we do not like in our own constituencies from time to time, most of us would accept that, by and large, the planning procedures operate well. They are generally perceived to be operated fairly because they have a strong local content, a strong devolution locally to elected representatives and a strong and easy means of participation and consultation with the people who are likely to be most closely affected by them on the ground.

The great weakness of the private Bill procedures, and the scepticism and fear of them locally, is that for major and highly contentious developments such as a high-speed railway line through green fields, those local people who would most expect to be consulted, have procedures explained to them and be given a genuine opportunity for making their objections felt, find that the traditional means of their involvement in the planning process have been taken away from them. Instead, they are left with a new process, removed from them locally, which makes it difficult for them to participate practically in the process. That is the nub of the problem. I believe that the Committee is entirely right to try to ensure that that does not happen in future, and that for major controversial applications we revert more to the normal planning processes.

It is an illusion that the private Bill procedure gives local people the same rights that they would have in the normal planning process. I do not think that those affected by controversial decisions made in the private Bill procedure would endorse such a view. A Select Committee charged with such a responsibility is bound not to be able to provide as much time as an inspector working full time in a public inquiry; it will not be able to go into the same detail.

Opportunities to object directly to Select Committee members are very limited. Elected local representatives have no direct involvement in the decision-making process: they are cut off from it completely. As for parliamentary representatives, although those with direct constituency interests can make their views known on Second Reading and on the Floor of the House, they are debarred from participation in the Committee's proceedings.

On 13 April, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport answered a question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) about the possibility of British Rail's promoting a private Bill for the high-speed line. He said:

"Objectors have the opportunity to petition against the Bill to Select Committees of both Houses of Parliament, who have the power to amend the Bill in response to the petitions received. This provides an appropriate mechanism for objections to British Rail's proposals to be considered if they have not been resolved in consultations prior to the Bill's introduction."—[*Official Report*, 13 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. *648*.]

I disagree. In my view the Select Committee procedure is far from being an appropriate mechanism for the hearing

of objections, and for giving people confidence that their views are being seriously assessed. I strongly endorse recommendation 5, which states:

"In principle, in cases where planning considerations are dominant, all works proposals for which private Bill approval is presently required should instead be authorised through non-parliamentary procedures involving the holding, where necessary, of a public local inquiry into objections."

Our sceptism in Kent about the private Bill procedure is reinforced by our experience with the Channel Tunnel Bill. Let me make it clear that I am in no way criticising Members on either side of the House who served on that Bill; they undoubtedly did all that they could to assess the project. The fact remains, however, that the Bill went through the whole private Bill procedure and was ultimately approved by the House on the basis of one totally fundamental and incorrect statement made by British Rail. That statement was that there were no plans to build a new railway line through Kent. As a result the Bill was passed with little difficulty, but had there been a public inquiry I do not believe that British Rail's bland statement would have withstood the rigours that such an inquiry can involve.

I very much hope that considerations will be given to a public inquiry procedure in future for such Bills, particularly for a high-speed line Bill, and that in that instance the inquiry could be held in Kent and south-east London. The Bill would be presented in the normal way: I accept that British Rail could not obtain all the statutory powers that it would need to construct such a line through the normal planning process, and would need wider powers which can be conferred only through parliamentary legislation and the private Bill procedure. I feel, however, that British Rail—and, indeed, my right hon. Friend and hon. Friends in the Department of Transport —would be well advised to dovetail with the normal private Bill procedure a means of holding a full inquiry in Kent and south-east London.

The process will not be credible locally if the Select Committee members hold a few meetings in Kent and a few in south-east London—as happened with the Channel Tunnel Bill—return to Westminster and then produce their report. The fact is that, with the best will in the world, Members of Parliament cannot devote enough time to performing the sort of local inquiry job that is necessary on such occasions. A properly staffed inspector is needed, who can provide a service eight hours a day, five days a week, listening to all objections and evalutating them.

I believe that a Select Committee should be empowered to establish such an inspector to carry out a public inquiry, within a period defined by the Committee. Such an inspector must have the time and resources to report back to the Committee. That, I believe, can be done without prejudicing the basic timetable for a high-speed line Bill. I have taken to heart what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). There can be no question of giving an inspector the opportunity to hear representations on a variety of alternative routes: that would bring back the serious blight problem from which we in Kent have escaped. There is, however, a sensible role for such an inspector to play.

In the case of the high-speed line, the inspector would make his report only in the context of the particular route that British Rail proposes. That would not only ensure that the House carried out its proper functions in relation to private legislation, but provide a new dimension in which those affected by such proposals could have their objections heard in a local framework. They would present oral or written evidence, and the report would be submitted to the Select Committee here. Such a combination of procedures could, I think, deal with the deficiencies highlighted in the Joint Committee's report.

A specific feature of the high-speed line proposal directly affects my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who was here earlier in the debate. That is the possibility of the construction of a new station on a green-field site in the mid-Kent area, the so-called Mid-Kent Parkway station. That is solely a planning matter; it is not integral to the high-speed line. It is a straight development proposal, not very different from any other large development proposal —for instance, an industrial or commercial proposal for an out-of-town shopping centre or an industrial trading estate, the kind of proposal that is dealt with every day of the week by planning authorities.

I would go further than the Committee: I think that such proposals should be dealt with very firmly, and always, through the local planning system. There is no case for a Committee of the House to be involved in a development which would be an optional extra for this high-sped line. I hope that it will not form any part of the British Rail Bill and that it will be dealt with exclusively through the normal planning process.

I was heartened by paragraph 21 of the memorandum that the Lord President presented to the Joint Committee, which it considered in its proceedings of 16 December 1987. He said:

"The Government recognises however that on occasion the planning aspects of schemes of the type described in paragraph 19 can be very significant and controversial. In one or two exceptional cases over the years, the Government has used its influence, directly with the promoter, to secure the consideration of the planning aspects of the scheme at a public inquiry under the Planning Acts. In appropriate cases, it would be prepared to do so again, or *in extremis* to ask Parliament to block the Bill".

I very much welcome that statement. The Government should regard the high-speed line Bill as an appropriate case. They should recognise that such a Bill will be a uniquely controversial and contentious piece of legislation, and they should use their influence with the promoters to ensure a public inquiry, within defined limits, on certain aspects of it.

9.1 pm

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): This take note debate on the Joint Committee's report on private Bill procedure is very much a matter for old parliamentary hands and for those well versed in the intricacies of parliamentary procedure, so it is with some trepidation that I intervene in the debate.

I welcome the general content of the report. I can see the problems arising from the growing number of private Bills before the House. I am also aware of the controversy among hon. Members and the public in general over the amount of lobbying and the number of consultants in the House at present. As has already been demonstrated, the vast majority of private Bills are concerned with private interests and, although I accuse no one of anything, they may lead to many attempts to influence hon. Members on behalf of commercial interests.

As a member of a Committee considering a private Bill from October to the beginning of February, I could see

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that problems caused for ordinary petitioners on private Bills when it came to the cost of travel to London, the expense of overnight accommodation and, above all, the time taken up.

I would like to speak from my own experience of a Committee considering a private Bill and to begin with a quotation from the report of the Joint Committee in paragraph 32 at the top of page 14:

"*Private bills are not in the opinion of the Committee an appropriate system for authorising works of purely local significance.* The Committee would regard the transfer of power from Parliament in these cases not as a substantial constitutional shift, but as a logical step in a pattern of historical development and a necessary response to modern requirements."

While I agree with that statement, it does not necessarily follow that anything that is of much wider national significance ought to be the subject of a private Bill. I was a member of the Committee that considered the opposed private Bills, the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill. Such was the complexity and political nature of the Bill that, at the conclusion of its consideration of the No. 2 Ports Bill, the Committee felt it necessary to present to the House a special report.

I would like to read from that report—it may unfortunately be a little boring—two paragraphs to make my point. The first is paragraph 20:

"The Committee decided unanimously that *if* the petitioners' assessment of the amount of coal likely to be imported through Immingham proves correct, then the consequences for the British coal industry could be, to use the word employed by Counsel for the Coalfield Communities Campaign, 'horrendous.' Those consequences might include the closure of as many 15 collieries, the loss of 15,000 jobs, the permanent sterilization of energy resources, and 'knock on' effects on local communities across Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire. The Committee is aware of the dangers of allowing the import of coal on this scale, and is very sympathetic to the petitioners in the case they made concerning this".

I have read that not because I want to go into the details of the Committee's discussion, but to emphasise that this private Bill Committee of four hon. Members was concerned with issues of enormous national significance. It was concerned with the not insignificant effect of imports on the balance of trade. It was concerned with the whole question of energy policy, which has been the subject of great debate in Select Committee. It sat at a time when the privatisation of electricity generation was being discussed. The Bill has also markedly affected the long-standing agreement between the nationalised Central Electricity Generating Board and British Coal on contracts for coal-fired power stations. It has greatly affected the job prospects and economies of a large part of the Midlands and Yorkshire.

These are tendentious national issues and, when it comes to the relationship between the Government and the mining communities, issues of real passion.

I was struck by the fact that the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means said, correctly, that hon. Members who serve on private Bill Committees must do so in a completely disinterested way. It is impossible for any hon. Member coming to the House as a political animal, representing a political party, to be completely disinterested when debating national policy and controversies of such a nature. It shows that this sort of matter should not be the property of a private Bill Committee.

This was the feeling of all four members of the Committee on which I served, two Conservative Members and two Labour Members, and I would like to quote from the report because it makes the point a little more clearly:

"The petitioners' arguments put the Committee in a position of great difficulty. In effect we were invited to make a strategic decision affecting United Kingdom energy policy, and one which affects also Britain's general policy on trade, because it relates to whether protectionist measures are justifiable to safeguard the interests of an important sector of British industry. We do not consider that this is an appropriate decision to be taken by a small committee consisting of four backbench MPs, three of whom are serving in their first Parliament. It is a great burden of responsibility to place upon a private Bill committee. There has been no technical breach of private Bill procedure, but we do consider that that procedure has been stretched to its limits by the various arguments advanced before the Committee. The decisions on energy and trade policy we have been invited to take are, in our opinion, national decisions which are the ultimate responsibility of the national government."

We had two Bills before the one Committee. As the procedure is that the chairmanship of Bill Committee goes alternately to the two major parties, it meant that both Bills were considered under one chairman, who had a casting vote. This meant a built-in majority for the Government in the Committee. There were no objections. I am not suggesting that there was any impropriety, but it is regrettable that such a controversial issue was handled in that way.

I have been a Member of Parliament for about 22 months. When I reached the third month of sitting for three days a week on the Bill—representing, as I do, a constituency with the lowest rates of pay in Britain and with more than its fair share of social deprivation, which involves a large burden of correspondence and case work—I began to feel that my initials were "M.U.G." and that my surname had been changed to "Naive." I understand now why so few hon. Members volunteer to serve on private Bill Committees, particularly Members with large caseloads.

Only four Members serve on those Committees. The quorum is three. I am glad that one of the recommendations is that the quorum should be changed. It meant, in my case, that if one member of the Committee was not present I could not indulge my craving for nicotine. That may have been good for my health, as a nicotine addict. However, it also meant that the normal human function of going to the lavatory became a major issue if one member of the Committee was absent. Bewigged ladies and gentlemen were being paid enormous sums of money an hour. Even a five-minute visit to the gents meant that one was probably depriving them of several hundreds of pounds in fees. That is nonsense.

I support the increase in the number of members to five. Enormous pressure is put on the Chairman. He has the casting vote, in certain circumstances. A Committee of five members would be much fairer and much more reasonable. However, I should be prepared to support the recommendation only if it meant that the 3:2 majority, particularly on controversial Bills, alternated, just as the chairmanship alternates now. If it meant a built-in Government majority, few Opposition Members would be prepared to sit on such Committees.

We sat for the longest time for many years on a private Bill. At the end of our deliberations we thought that we might get into "The Guinness Book of Records." However, I foresee that the King's Cross development and the Channel tunnel will lead to the deletion of our names from that book, even before it is printed.

9.12 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I support what all hon. Members have said about the main thrust of the report. It is comprehensive and detailed. It highlights the fact that our present methods of handling legislation have become increasingly out of date and unsatisfactory. That is not surprising, bearing in mind historical development of the private Bill procedure at a time when few, if any, of the present planning procedures were in place. I hope that the fact that the recommendations have been so strongly supported will encourage my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to seek their rapid implementation.

Recommendation 1 reads:

"Promoters of a private bill should be required to prove before the committee on the bill that private legislation is necessary to secure the primary purpose of the bill."

It is important that we should limit the number of private Bills and that on Second Reading greater attention should be paid to whether it is correct that the Bill ought in fact to be before the House.

I support those hon. Members who argue strongly in support of recommendation 5, which relates to planning considerations. There is a strong argument for taking private Bills, where there is a dominant planning element, out of the planning procedure.

I also support the view that an easily digestible handbook on private Bill procedure ought to be made available. It is difficult for the general public to understand parliamentary procedure. The report suggests that Members of Parliament need a handbook. It should also be made available to the public. It must be written in plain English that can be easily understood.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) referred to the fears of the public if they come as petitioners before a Committee on private Bills. The aura of this place, the limited facilities for doing any work here as petitioners and the difficulty of coming to Parliament are obstacles in the way of petitioners making their case adequately, compared with their position at a public inquiry that is held locally, in familiar surroundings and on familiar ground. People feel more confident in those circumstances.

That is not to imply that our current procedures cannot be turned to good account. I do not intend to refer to Kent in great detail, since other hon. Members have referred to this. I accept that we shall have to deal with the high-speed link within the present legislative framework. There are many ways in which the Bill could be delayed. Hon. Members can put pressure on the promoter of the Bill, British Rail, to make concessions so as to meet the general concerns of our constituents.

The radical proposal of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling deserves to be fully considered by the Government. He has suggested that the Committee that deals with petitions against the high-speed rail link should be provided with greater resources. The final decision will ultimately be made by the House. However, my right hon. Friend has suggested that an inspector should conduct a public inquiry within a time scale established by the Committee. That would go a long way towards providing a better opportunity for petitioners to air their concerns and for the very real worries of all those who are likely to be affected by the high-speed rail link, and by similar important legislation, to be expressed with confidence.

The public demonstrations against the rail link in Kent and the problems that will arise because of people's fears are partly due to the fact that the public are not familiar with the private Bill procedure. Very few Members of Parliament are familiar with the procedure. That point is clearly made in the report, and it has been referred to in the debate. The existing framework allows the fears of the public to be well aired, but it does not inspire confidence. In supporting the thrust of the Joint Committee report, I realise that such changes will take time, but they need not take very long if the Government and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House are prepared to put their full weight behind the changes which I believe to be long overdue.

9.19 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I apologise for having been unable to be present for much of the debate this afternoon, but I listened very carefully to the speech of the Leader of the House, and I was disappointed in the Government's apparent lack of sympathetic response to many of the recommendations in the Joint Committee report.

The Joint Committee report addressed a number of problems which are evident in relation to private Bills submitted to the House, especially private Bills of a highly controversial nature. I am becoming ever more familiar with the niceties of private Bill procedure. For the first time in a number of years, a private Bill relates to very specific matters which will have an enormous impact on my constituents—the King's Cross Railways Bill. The forces ranged against local people in voicing their protest against British Rail's plans, in trying to understand private Bill procedure and find out how to petition against British Rail's proposals, in facing objections to their locus standi as petitioners and in trying to find their way around the current complex and daunting private Bill procedures have been something of an eye-opener.

I wish to pick up a point on which I had a brief exchange with the Leader of the House. He seemed to imply that in his view the present procedure was fair between petitioners and promotors, but I cannot agree with him. The present system is heavily biased in favour of the promotors of a Bill and against the petitioners. I can provide one or two examples that relate specifically to the King's Cross Railways Bill.

That Bill will destroy an entire neighbourhood in my constituency. If implemented, it will demolish a considerable number of homes and destroy a considerable number of businesses. It will knock the stuffing out of a community that has been under threat for 10, 15 or 20 years and has been painstakingly rebuilt by local residents. It is a precious flower that is about to be trampled, and the people of King's Cross do not want that to happen.

Quite justifiably, they are anxious to make their views known in the most effective way they can about British Rail's absurd proposals for a vast underground international station at King's Cross. Understandably, many of them decided to petition. Leaving aside the sheer

[Mr. Chris Smith]

difficulty of petitioning—the petition has to be in a particular form of words in a particular format and it has to be submitted on a particular day—there is a specific deadline which is not publicly advertised and which they have to find out by contacting their Member of Parliament or the Private Bill Office. Having submitted their petitions against the Bill, many of them have encountered objections, not directly from British Rail, but from the agents acting for British Rail who are challenging their locus standi as petitioners.

I shall give just one example of the absurdity of that. Many of my constituents who live in Northdown street, which is immediately adjacent to the site for the proposed railway station, have submitted petitions. It appears that the agents acting for British Rail have accepted the locus standi of virtually all the petitions from Northdown street, but they have objected to the locus standi of one petitioner who lives in the middle of Northdown street, surrounded by other petitioners whose locus standi has not been objected to by the agents acting for British Rail.

I do not want to trespass beyond the limits of the debate, but it seems to me that a private Bill procedure that allows petitioners to face that sort of difficulty cannot possibly be right.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Am I right in saying that this matter is already before the Court of Referees?

Mr. Smith: I understand that the matter will come before the Court of Referees in due course, but, as far as I am aware, the petitions to which I referred have not yet been before the Court of Referees.

Mr. Speaker: Although the hon. Gentleman can legitimately draw attention to this sort of thing, it is rather wide of the debate and he should not take us too far along this line.

Mr. Smith: Of course I shall accept your guidance, Mr. Speaker. I raised the issue merely to illustrate my point that the procedure for petitioning is extremely difficult, daunting and complex for people who wish to object to a private Bill.

In claiming that the private Bill procedure was even-handed between petitioners and promoters, the Leader of the House said that, in his opinion, the recommendations in the Joint Committee report would make life very difficult for the promoters of Bills. He said that it would be much more time-consuming, expensive and difficult for promoters if they had to go through normal planning procedures on planning matters.

Surely that is the nub of the point. It is my contention that if British Rail wants to carry out a considerable amount of work in the south-western corner of my constituency at King's Cross, if it wants to change the face of the neighbourhood and if it wants to decide a major transport issue about the best location for an international train station, those are matters that should be considered at greater length, in greater detail and by a more democratic procedure than is possible under the present private Bill procedure. If that means that British Rail has to take more time about it and has to do the job better than it has hitherto given evidence of doing in relation to King's Cross, so much the better.

For the Leader of the House to argue that we should not accept more proposals of the Joint Committee because they would make life more difficult for the promoters of private Bills is not good enough. In many respects, life should be made more difficult for the promoters of private Bills. Life is too easy for them. The sloppy way in which British Rail has hitherto made its decisions in relation to King's Cross bears out that point.

Mr. Dobson: Does my hon. Friend agree that British Rail has been sloppy, or devious, in that it has submitted to the House its Bill to dig rather than build a station at King's Cross in such a way that it can successfully challenge the locus standi of Members all along the line intended to connect that station with the Channel tunnel, and also in such a way that it has even excluded works at King's Cross associated with the Euro-tunnel, which means that those works will have to be the subject of part of its second Bill? Does he agree that that salami tactic would be impossible at a public inquiry?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. I suspect that he and I will shortly be making common cause on that Bill. He will know better than I, because it is on his side of the constituency boundary, that the residents of Acton street and Swinton street in the immediate vicinity of King's Cross have already received approaches from people acting for British Rail, seeking to prepare material for another private Bill which is due to be tabled in the House in six to eight months' time, and which will relate to work directly relevant to the works contained in the private Bill currently before the House. As yet, we do not know the details of those works. It is absurd that we are talking about a private Bill whose ramifications we cannot discuss until another Bill is tabled in the House, some 12 months after the initial proposal.

The inadequacies of the private Bill procedure when addressing such detailed and important planning matters are all too clear. I cannot agree with the argument of the Leader of the House that we cannot accept that part of the Joint Committee's report because it would make life more difficult for the promoters of private Bills. It would make life more difficult for them, but it is important that that happens, because life is too difficult for petitioners and too easy for promoters at present.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend's remarks. He can correct me if I am wrong, but is he saying in effect that, if the second part of the report is not accepted, the gross inequality because of resources between promoters and petitioners will continue, and that in some way it is fair that that gross inequality should continue to exist?

Mr. Smith: The Leader of the House seems to be saying that he is not prepared to accept some of the earlier recommendations in the Joint Committee report, which would take out of the private Bill procedure many of the planning issues that I object to being included in the procedure—the Joint Committee agrees with me—but he is prepared to accept some of the later recommendations which will make the procedure in the House for private Bills smoother, quicker and easier. By saying that, the Leader of the House has dangerously unbalanced the careful package that the Joint Committee put together.

The Joint Committee wants to exclude the planning issues from the private Bill procedure in the House, but as

a counterweight wants to make it easier to get the things that should be part of private Bills through the House in a more shipshape fashion. The Leader of the House seems to be saying, "Let's drop all the proposals for taking planning issues out of this procedure but let's speed up the procedures none the less"—which, to my mind, might result in the worst of all possible worlds. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) has raised an extremely interesting point.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out the essential balance incorporated by the Committee—and by the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson)—to which I accede, but does he agree that, even if that balance were incorporated, Bills such as those referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)—such as the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill and the Associated British Ports Bills—might still get through because, while they do not necessarily involve planning, although they might incidentally, they involve matters of considerable public policy that should be dealt with in another way than through private legislation?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the moment, two major issues that can come within the content of private Bills are not appropriate for private Bill procedures. The first are planning issues, which should be dealt with by public local inquiries, and the second are issues of public policy, such as those relating to the energy policy of the country, or to whatever else is relevant to the Bill. Such issues should not be subject to the private Bill procedure. Instead, they could be subject to primary legislation in this House and be preceded by a Select Committee report. There are other and better ways of addressing major public policy issues than the private Bill procedure.

The initial response of the Leader of the House to this excellent Joint Committee report—I congratulate all those involved in producing it—has been deeply disappointing. He has missed the considerable number of good points in the report, and he believes too much in the fairness of the present system. He has failed to take account of the inadequacies of the private Bill procedure to deal with planning matters or with major public policy issues and he has failed also to take account of the desperate need for this House to sort out better ways of dealing with such matters than those we have at the moment.

9.37 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Next month, I shall have been a Member for 10 years, during which time I have taken a close interest in private Bills for various reasons. Like other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I have found myself at various times passionately seeking to oppose private Bills and in recent times I have found myself passionately seeking to sponsor two private Bills which are currently before the House in one form or another, and which have been referred to several times in the debate.

In addition, although I have not had the opportunity of serving for as long as the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall), I have served for a considerable time as a member of a Private Bill Committee. In fact, I have served on two such Committees. Therefore, I come to the debate from every angle and you will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in previous debates on private Bills you will have seen me rise and then sit down an hour or two later when I have been seeking to oppose certain private Bills.

I hope that my few words will bring to bear the benefit of some experience and, at the outset, I should declare an interest because I am seeking to promote the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill.

The private Bill procedure has served reasonably well during the 10 years that I have been a Member of the House. I have lost some and I have won some. I have opposed some private Bills that have subsequently received the Royal Assent. I may have the opportunity of being able to move the Third Reading of one private Bill but it may be that I will be unable to move the Third Reading of the other. Obviously, it will be for the House as a whole to decide whether the Third Readings are given and it will also be for the other place to decide whether the Bills should be proceeded with.

I do not want to dwell too much on the specific Bills for which I have a responsibility, except to say that I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Bradford, North. It is a great stress and strain on any hon. Member who is selected by the Committee of Selection to serve on a private Bill. I have been in the hon. Gentleman's circumstance, but not for the same length of time.

I was unable to participate in the Private Bill Committee, because I had an interest, but I sat in the Public Gallery for many of the deliberations and I readily place on record the fact that it must have been a considerable strain to the four hon. Members who served from October last year until March of this year on the two Bills concerned. I accept that there is probably a case for considering the Joint Committee's proposals regarding the quorum and the size of the Committee. I imagine that it must have been difficult for the hon. Member for Bradford, North and his colleagues who have demanding constituencies, and who are active in the House in other ways, to give all the time that they would wish to all their other duties.

I am worried about one approach that appears to be envisaged by the Joint Committee, which is the feeling that there should be a transfer to ministerial control of some of the policy decisions that are sometimes implicit in private Bills.

One of the great joys that I relish as a Back Bench Member is the opportunity, when considering private legislation, to play some direct role in the outcome of that legislation. I am concerned about the prospect of transferring yet more decisions to ministerial control, with all that that implies in terms of party discipline and votes. I am not sure that there is much pressure to curtail parliamentary involvement or transfer subjects that have been handled in Parliament to ministerial control. I do not believe that there would be any obvious advantage in doing so or that there would necessarily be any greater safeguards. I would argue that Back Benchers with an assiduous ability and knowledge of parliamentary procedure can do a great deal either to promote or frustrate the passage of a private Bill. There is a strong argument for keeping such matters within the direct scrutiny of Parliament, rather than leaving them to Ministers and local authorities.

For the two private Bills in which I have a direct constituency interest, I would submit that, if the proposals of the Joint Committee were to be accepted in full, it would

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have been possible for the projects to come to fruition much more easily. As the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) made clear in an intervention in the speech of his hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) if only local authorities had been involved in giving planning permission for the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill projects, the procedures would have been easier. I know that both the Humberside county council and the Glanford borough council were in favour of the proposals that had been submitted to the House by the promoters of both those Bills.

Recommendation 9 says:

"The permitted scope of Harbour Orders under the Harbours Act 1964 should be broadened, so as to allow general powers to be included and a wider range of development to be authorised. S.62 of the 1964 Act should be repealed."

The Joint Committee refers the House to paragraph 60 of its recommendations.

I argue that that recommendation, coupled with the suggestion that, where possible, local authority planning powers should be used more, would, in the instance of the two private Bills I have mentioned, have enabled those proposals to be put forward by the promoters much more easily. Hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and his colleagues, have legitimate and genuine concerns about those two Bills.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, although the local authority might have been inclined to give planning permission easily, the Secretary of State always had the power to call in those projects and, therefore, to set up an inquiry? Had a proper public inquiry been held, it would have probably taken as long as consideration of the private Bills in Committee.

Mr. Michael Brown: I accept the general thrust of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Those private Bills were deposited before the House in November 1987. On the assumption that the Chairman of Ways and Means might name the day for the Third Reading of the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill during this Session, it is more than probable—even if the House grants the Bill a Third Reading and even if it gets a Third Reading in the other place—that it will be 1990, at the earliest, before the Bill is given the Royal Assent. I would be distressed if a public inquiry procedure took three years.

In the case of the two Bills mentioned, I believe that recommendation would lead to the House being bypassed to a greater extent. That would reduce the ability of the hon. Member for Wentworth and his colleagues, who have a legitimate interest in following the passage of those Bills, to raise relevant matters in public debate. It would also deny them the chance to delay and scrutinise those Bills.

Mr. Spearing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that even if the planning inquiry had been called in—that would have been wise and necessary before a short-circuiting Bill was presented; I deplore that procedure—the second element of public policy and purpose, which is of even greater concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), would not have been covered? Therefore, does he agree that, because of that, even if the planning matters had been dealt with sufficiently—they were not—it was inopportune to produce the Bills?

Mr. Brown: There is a philosophical divide between the hon. Gentleman and myself.

We are entering an era in which private enterprise will have a much greater role to play in our national economy. In the 19th century, at the height of the industrial revolution, private projects were the engine of industrial development. Private capital was the driving force behind the creation of the railway system. Therefore, it was inevitable that the private Bill procedure grew and grew in the 19th century.

During the latter part of the 20th century, more private ventures are being launched and they are the engine of further industrial development. As industrial development is underpinned by private enterprise, which is responsible for the new great development of our industries, docks, harbours, railways and the light transit projects, it is natural that more private Bills should be put before the House. They are a natural reflection of the industrial development currently taking place and they are no more than a repetition of what took place in the 19th century.

Mr. Wall: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for his kind recognition of the work carried out by the hon. Members who sit on the Committees on the Bills which he is sponsoring. The general thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument is that a private Bill should be seen as an opportunity for a Back Bencher to make a major contribution to issues relating to national policy. Can that not be seen from the opposite point of view? The Government have an opportunity through the back door with the private Bill procedure to extend their legislation, particularly with regard to the two Bills referred to by the hon. Gentleman, the privatisation of weights and measures and other Bills relating to local transport systems.

Mr. Brown: I am not sure whether I would argue that. I can think of many examples over the past 10 years where I have been on the other side of private Bills when it has been possible to frustrate a private Bill's passage.

Much of the Joint Committee report is commendable. However, it would involve our giving up many of the powers available to hon. Members to play a part in the decision-making process of the economic and industrial activities of this country. We should be cautious before we give up that valuable procedure.

9.50 pm

Mr. Wakeham: I said at the start of this debate that I wanted to hear the views of the House, and I have not been disappointed. I mentioned the complexity of the subject, and that too has been demonstrated. I am grateful for the comments by right hon. and hon. Members. They have been thoughtful and helpful. Apart from the difficulty in responding to them all in the time available, they require more detailed and considered reflection. In particular, I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) for his masterly exposition of the Joint Committee's thinking. I want also to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Sir P. Dean), the Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, for giving us his views.

Several hon. Members stressed the need to consider the report as a total package, not as a menu from which a selection might be made. I expressed our reservations about several of the major recommendations, but I also

indicated the willingness of my right hon. Friends to consult on the issues which would involve primary legislation. I know that they will study the report of this debate carefully. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has heard much of this debate and I am grateful to him for that.

However, with the best will in the world, even if that leads to legislation, that legislation could not be brought forward in the near future and if the House wished to treat the recommendations as a package, the procedural recommendations for which there is general support would have to await that legislation. I am not sure whether the streamlining of procedures is necessarily for the benefit of promoters. It is also for the benefit of the House. I note also that some hon. Members share our reservations about certain of the procedural recommendations, such as those concerned with blocking Bills and carry-over motions. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) was among those who appreciated the problems which could arise if control over rail schemes were removed from Parliament. In brief, I think that it will be very difficult for the report to be taken as a total package.

There are some procedural matters on which there would appear to be general agreement. If, after studying this debate, there seems to be a reasonable package of measures which can be put together, I will discuss that through the usual channels and with the Chairman of Ways and Means and see what might be done in time for the next Session. I cannot give the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) a date on which the House will be able to vote on these issues until those discussions have taken place. I am sure that in this, as in so much of our procedure, it is best to try to proceed on the basis of agreement.

Many hon. Members have espoused the cause of the petitioners and have made great play of the complexities and costs of the present procedure. They have even gone so far as to suggest that the balance of advantage lies unfairly with the promoters. That was the theme of a number of speeches, but several of the procedural recommendations—I am thinking particularly of those relating to costs and guidance—will help. I have already spoken of our reservations about other recommendations which would have worked against petitioners' interests. A specific point was that petitioners were disadvantaged by having to travel to London. But Private Bill Committees do have power to sit locally. Indeed, that was done in the case of the Channel Tunnel Bill. At the end of the day, the remedy lies in the hands of hon. Members who sit on those Committees.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: In the case of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, which is in the House of Lords at the moment, clearly it would be in the interests of many people in Cardiff who want to make representations about that Bill if the Committee were to sit in Cardiff. Bearing in mind their Lordships' other duties which have to be carried out in this building, that would be extremely difficult. In the case of the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill and the Associated British Ports (Hull) Bill, it would have been very difficult for the four members to spend a great deal of time taking evidence locally.

Mr. Wakeham: I am not saying that it would be easy or that it would be appropriate, and I am certainly not commenting on what goes on in the House of Lords—I have more sense than to begin to do that. I am saying simply that there is power to sit locally and that, on some occasions, that could be helpful. It is a factor that was not mentioned earlier in the debate, and it is right that I should mention it. I am sure that, even within the existing procedures, petitioners could be helped better to understand the processes and to present their case more effectively.

Much has been said during the debate about the superiority of the planning process over the private Bill procedure. On the face of it, the arguments sound attractive, but I am not convinced. The inquiry process on a major project involves the preparation and submission of a packaged scheme to a planning authority and thence to a Government Department, as a precursor to the inquiry stage of consideration. Once an inquiry has been arranged, voluminous evidence is produced and exchanged between the parties prior to the inquiry, but once the inquiry has opened, there is subsequently little if any room for negotiation leading to amendment of the proposals. The system is far less flexible in respect of precisely those major schemes where maximum scope for negotiation and compromise ought to be in operation.

Moreover, an inspector, in considering what evidence is relevant to the eventual decision, is heavily constrained by existing Government planning and related policies. These are not matters which he has discretion to override in his recommendations. If he were to attempt to do so, it is unlikely that the relevant Minister would be happy to agree to it.

Several hon. Members—perfectly understandably—took the opportunity to refer to King's Cross. I do not quarrel with that at all. I do not intend to consider the merits and issues of this particular case, nor would it be right for me to do so. However, I recognise the passion and force with which hon. Members have pursued it. My right hon. Friend has heard much of the debate and will, I know, read the report with great interest and close attention. I think that this debate has shown that this is an important subject, and not one to be dismissed as an obscure procedural matter on the periphery of matters of real concern. The topics with which private Bills deal are matters of real concern to those who promote them and those who object to them. They are matters of concern to Parliament, and we shall return to the subject.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Lord Commissioner of the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

BUILDING SOCIETIES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Building Societies (Money Transmission Services) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 22nd March, be approved.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

General Commissioners of Income Tax

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

9.59 pm

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): My reason for putting forward the case for drawing up comprehensive rules of procedure for the general commissioners of income tax is twofold. First, I have been seeking to meet the justified complaints of a constituent in his dealings with the general commissioners. Secondly, it it evident that this is not an isolated case and I intend to refer specifically to the appropriate recommendations of the Council on Tribunals on the matter.

The complaint made by my constituent, Mr. P. H. J. Palmer of Bognor Regis, first reached me nearly three years ago. Mr. Palmer, who was then 74 years of age, wrote to me as a result of his experience in an appeal to the commissioners of taxes, Chichester division, in May 1986. The appeal was for an allowance on his income tax for expenses and legal fees in revising the level of his pension through negotiations with a former employer.

However, it is important to grasp that Mr. Palmer's principal objections——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Mr. Marshall: It is important to stress that neither then nor subsequently did my constituent argue with the fact that his appeal was refused, but rather with the manner in which the decision was made. Among the complaints that he made were that a large number of persons attended what was supposed to be a private hearing with commissioners and those persons clearly had no involvement with his case; that the chairman gave no reasons or explanation for the decision; that he was refused permission to ask questions or make a statement after the decision was announced; that the general commissioners did not have the necessary professional expertise to understand the detailed submission made by the tax inspector, and that the clerk to the commissioners failed to respond to written questions on the basis for the decision or to suggest any other authority to whom he could turn by way of appeal.

At that stage, Mr. Palmer approached me and I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. He advised me that the commissioners' decision was final and took the view that it would be improper for the Treasury or the Inland Revenue to comment on decisions of the general commissioners or the conduct of their meetings because of their function as an independent appeal body and given the Inland Revenue's own need —and, by extension, that of the Treasury—to accept a ruling in a case in which it was one of the competing parties.

I could not believe that there could be a total lack of accountability for the general commissioners and the clerk whom they appoint. Approaches to the ombudsman confirmed that the general commissioners were appointed by the Lord Chancellor, and their allowances, as well as the salaries for their clerks, were met from the Inland Revenue vote. The ombudsman also recommended an approach to the Council on Tribunals which monitors the activities and efficiency of such bodies.

Correspondence between my constituent and myself with the Council on Tribunals over a period of many months revealed that a number of options were open to Mr. Palmer. Although it is correct that the commissioners do not have to give reasons for their decisions, those could be obtained by asking for a case to be stated in the High Court as part of an appeal. In the light of that advice, Mr. Palmer contended, almost a year after the initial hearing, that the chairman's refusal to answer questions and the clerk's unwillingness to provide information by subsequent letters all ruled out his opportunities for a prompt appeal. He also objected, as many would, to the necessity and expense of going to law for the purpose of unearthing the commissioners' reasons for rejecting his case.

Meanwhile, I had kept my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary informed, and in a letter of 23 March 1987 he advised me—this is particularly significant—that the Inland Revenue felt that it was arguable that the procedures at the original hearing were inadequate. He added:

> "The Inland Revenue agree that they would not want to deprive Mr. Palmer of the opportunity to air his views properly and accordingly they proposed to approach the matter afresh."

Unfortunately, the meeting which followed produced only a further agreement to disagree on the details of the claim. Meanwhile, the Council on Tribunals had taken up Mr. Palmer's complaints with the clerk to the general commissioners. In a letter to Mr. Palmer of 5 May 1987, the council, acting on information received from the clerk, criticised a number of aspects of the procedures followed at the original hearing. They included the number of income tax inspectors attending the case, with which they were not concerned. In addition, they said that the clerk should have explained in response to subsequent letters why no reasons had been given for the decision, and he should also have provided information on how to appeal. However, it is fair to add that the clerk, himself a solicitor, subsequently said that he advised Mr. Palmer to seek legal advice.

Arising from all this and from later correspondence —we are now about 18 months away from the original hearing, which illustrates the sort of difficulty that members of the public, and even Members of Parliament, have in unearthing the detailed opportunities that exist to pursue such matters—it became clear that both the Treasury and the Council on Tribunals recognised the problems caused by a lack of procedural rules for the general commissioners, and indeed the Treasury had put forward a consultation document in response to the Keith committee's recommendations, with a deadline of 31 October 1987.

The scene in this long-running detective story now shifts to the Lord Chancellor's office. It was clear that my constituent still felt that his complaints should be considered by a responsible person. Accordingly, on the advice of the Council on Tribunals, I took up the case with the Lord Chancellor. In letters of 31 March and 10 June 1988, he replied to a number of letters in considerable detail, and I pay tribute to his part in this in responding in the way he did, although, as I shall show later, that highlights one of the problems in the present procedures.

In the interest of time, I will comment only on a number of points that arose from correspondence with the Lord Chancellor. First, it seems ridiculous that complaints against the general commissioners and their clerk, particularly in cases not involving massive matters of principle, and possibly involving even relatively small complaints, should have to involve the highest Law Officer in the land in pursuing complaints about procedure.

Secondly, if he wishes to consider complaints against an individual commissioner, the Lord Chancelior has powers to ask his advisory committee to investigate and make recommendations. Thirdly, in the case of the clerk, his powers are those of outright dismissal.

All those powers constitute using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and it is typical of the problems that I have highlighted—the delays in finding out who could do what—that the clerk concerned had retired before the Lord Chancellor had an opportunity of considering the matter and deciding whether dismissal would be appropriate in such a case.

To summarise, I can do no better than to draw attention to the annual report of the Council on Tribunals which was laid before the House on 16 January 1989, and which I hope that the House will find an opportunity to debate before long in its wider context. In paragraph 2.21 of that report, the council says:

"The need for change is clear from the visits made by our members to hearings, from representations that have been made to us and from complaints we have dealt with. We urge the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Inland Revenue to consider our proposals as a whole and to introduce a comprehensive range of reforms. In particular, we stress the need for—

(1) an early change of departmental responsibility for General Commissioners from the Inland Revenue to the Lord Chancellor's Department;
(2) establishment of a central body capable of representing General Commissioners, whether by introduction of a presidential system or of a national consultative body;
(3) early provision of procedural rules for conduct of tribunal proceedings; and
(4) introduction of proper training and the provision of adequate resources for this to be undertaken."

I understand that at present, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Inland Revenue accept the need for change in departmental responsibility to overcome any doubts about the impartiality of the commissioners as a result of their close working relationship with the Inland Revenue.

The problem here seems to be one of time and other commitments, and the council has already expressed its concern at what it sees as delays in making a vital change. But on the question of rules of procedure, I understand that consideration was to be given to the possibility of including such proposals in this year's Finance Bill. I hope that the Solicitor-General will give a clear indication of the Government's intentions in that matter.

Training is a key element in ensuring that the procedural rules can be implemented effectively. That bears directly on my constituent's concern and that of the Council on Tribunals about lack of technical expertise. I understand that training will be undertaken in future by the recently established tribunals committee of the Judicial Studies Board. Will the Solicitor-General comment on that?

To sum up, my constituent is clearly not alone in feeling that there is too much of "a law unto themselves" about the procedures of the general commissioners. I join the Council on Tribunals in expressing admiration of the substantial amount of work done by the commissioners on an unpaid basis, which is a measure of their dedication of public service. I recognise the value of the important work that they willingly undertake in communities throughout the country. However, it is equally clear that the problem is not with the commissioners but with the lack of procedural rules and the training that goes with them. Together with an over-dependence on the Inland Revenue, those are all factors which require early change if my constituent and others are to feel that they have not suffered injustice.

10.10 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) for raising a number of interesting and significant points on a subject of considerable importance relating to the general commissioners of income tax. I welcome the opportunity that the debate gives to meet his points and to outline for the benefit of my hon. Friend and of a wider audience the considerations that lie behind our present policy and our proposals to meet some of the concerns that my hon. Friend expressed.

I shall concentrate, as my hon. Friend expects me to do, on matters of principle and practice rather than on the case of his individual constituent. That case is not itself the subject of a complaint as to the decision reached, which was fully and fairly dealt with at a number of levels, concluding with a long and detailed letter from my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor himself.

The starting point to any understanding of the role of general commissioners is the Taxes Management Act 1970. In England and Wales, and recently Northern Ireland, the Act places responsibility for the appointment of general commissioners upon the Lord Chancellor. Scotland has different arrangements. At the last count, there were 4,081 general commissioners in England and Wales, and to that number must be added the 55 commissioners appointed in Northern Ireland. General commissioners are appointed to sit in a division, and the country is divided into 417 of those.

It is important to emphasise one of the safeguards for the general public, which is also a ground for reassurance. The general commissioners are lay people who volunteer their service. I express my thanks to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about the enormous bulk of good work that the general commissioners perform. Their names come to the Lord Chancellor for appointment through 80 advisory committees that he established for that purpose. The general commissioners have a clerk—and if needs be, an assistant clerk—to assist them in the discharge of their duties. It is for the clerk to make the necessary arrangements for the disposal of work, including notice of appeal hearing dates, and to advise the general commissioners on procedural matters and on any questions of law that may arise.

A distinction must be drawn between general and special commissioners. The latter are full-time, legally qualified appointees who deal mainly with more complicated cases—and I know from my limited experience that some cases are very complicated—or those likely to last for some considerable time. The jurisdiction of general commissioners covers income tax, corporation

[The Solicitor-General]

tax, capital gains tax, and certain aspects of class 4 national insurance contributions paid by the self-employed.

The bulk of their work is devoted to dealing with delay appeals. That may explain some of the complaints in the individual case that my right hon. Friend mentioned. the number of cases that must be dealt with on a particular day can be very high.

For those who do not appreciate it, a delay appeal is generally one in which the taxpayer—usually a trader or trading company—has lodged an appeal against an estimated tax assessment, but has taken no further step, by submitting his business accounts or other relevant information, to show that the assessment is incorrect in principle or excessive in amount. There must be few hon. Members with any business experience who have not experienced this procedure—at least through their accountants. The latest available information—and this shows the weight of work—reveals that 591,486 delay appeals were referred to the general commissioners in 1987, although most of these were subsequently determined by agreement with the inspector.

The Lord Chancellor regards it as important that the general commissioners should acquire and maintain experience and consistency in their determination of these appeals, and as a general rule, it is expected that each general commissioner will sit for a minimum of six sessions a year. The private affairs of taxpayers are recognised to be confidential and therefore a general commissioner on appointment is required to sign a form of declaration of secrecy before he can act. In general, three general commissioners are present at each sitting.

It is also important to note that general commissioners must act impartially, and section 5 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 provides that no general commissioner shall act as such in relation to any matter in which he has a personal interest, or is interested on behalf of another person, except with the express consent of the parties to the proceedings. The commissioners are instructed to seek advice if they are in any doubt about whether they have any connection with the proceedings that might be seen as bringing the commissioners' impartiality into question. They are also instructed that they should take particular care to treat appellants and representatives of the Inland Revenue in a like manner. That is important because it is not merely enough for justice to be done, it must be seen to be done.

Mr. Michael Marshall: I entirely accept what my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General has said. Does he agree that this gives even greater force to a point which, in the interests of time, I omitted—the Council on Tribunals' recommendation that Inland Revenue officers concerned with cases should come into cases at the same time as members of the public? The idea of coming in to see members of the Inland Revenue and the general tax commission sitting, as it were, at the top table, gives the wrong impression in terms of treating each even-handedly.

The Solicitor-General: There is force in what my hon. Friend says. Whether exactly the right way to deal with it is for the two parties to come in separately or whether the matter should be handled so that it is more like what, in some ways it is—a crowded court—I know from my own experience that courts dealing with large numbers of matters in one morning always have large numbers of counsel. I appreciate that one of his constituent's concern was that he seemed to be in a room in which there were an awful lot of people with a precise purpose. It would have given a better impression if, at least, their respective functions had been clearly delineated. We shall look carefully at that matter and I shall pass on my hon. Friend's remarks.

As part of the necessary background to an appreciation of the role of general commissioners, I draw attention to certain relevant provisions of the Taxes Management Act. First, in an appeal against an assessment, the initial burden of proof is normally—as hon. Members will realise—on the taxpayer, unlike most other cases, where the burden is on the prosecution or the plaintiff. Secondly, the decision of the general commissioners is normally final. However, if aspects of difficulty arise before the decision is reached, the matter may be referred—either at the request of the taxpayer or on the initiative of the commissioners—to the special commissioners.

Once made, the decision of the general commissioners is final and conclusive unless the appeal is taken further by way of case stated or, in unusual circumstances, by judicial review. In this context it is understandable that, once the decision is taken, it would not be appropriate for a taxpayer to ask questions. It is important to stress that, in this particular case, there was plenty of opportunity to ask questions and present the case before the decision was reached.

Having sketched in outline the background to the general commissioners, let me now address some of the other points made by my hon. Friend. He emphasised the case for drawing up comprehensive rules of procedure for the commissioners. The Lord Chancellor and the Treasury are indeed considering carefully the proposals of the Council on Tribunals, but—as my hon. Friend would be the first not only to recognise but, I believe, to urge—a balance must be struck between the formality of procedures which, in other respects, are often criticised for being over-formal, and the need for a speedy, effective and common-sense process.

Treasury Ministers have decided to seek further views on that difficult question, and it would be unwise to form a concluded opinion until the results of the exercise have been received. Thorough consideration, however, will be given to the various advantages and disadvantages of moving away from the present relatively informal system to what would inevitably be a rather less flexible one. No doubt attention will be given to the fact that the vast majority of appellants are not represented by someone legally qualified.

My hon. Friend also stressed what he perceives as a lack of accountability on the part of the general commissioners. There is no doubt, however, that the commissioners play a responsible and invaluable part in dealing fairly and efficiently with a large number of appeals. The Council on Tribunals has joined my hon. Friend in paying tribute—in its recent annual report—to the substantial amount of good work that the commissioners do.

If, however, my hon. Friend is concerned about the lack of a proper chain of command, I can make some observations. The general commissioners are lay people drawn from the community—this cannot be emphasised enough—and for the most part their duties involve a common-sense approach. Where there is an issue of law, a

Commissioner will rightly turn to his clerk for guidance and will act accordingly. If a mistake is made, the appellant has the right to take the case to the High Court by the case stated procedure.

Let me put the matter into perspective. To the best of my knowledge such cases are few and far between. If the appellant is aggrieved at the method by which the Commissioners have reached a decision on the facts, it is open to him to consider seeking redress through judicial review. Should his complaint relate to the conduct of a commissioner—this was raised at one stage in the case in question—and if there appears to be a case to answer, the Lord Chancellor will require his advisory committee to investigate and make a report to him before deciding on the appropriate course of action.

My hon. Friend also had in mind the criticisms levelled at the general commissioners in the 1987-88 annual report by the Council on Tribunals. In particular, the council expressed disappointment that the Lord Chancellor had not accorded a higher priority to his Department's assuming overall control of the general commissioners. The Lord Chancellor, while recognising and accepting the case for his Department to take over full administrative responsibility, is engaged in a wide-ranging consideration of a number of his responsibilities, which need to be sensibly dovetailed. He wishes to reach a conclusion on how to deal with a number of matters in the legal and quasi-legal sphere, and he needs to balance the competing demands on resources before deciding on the order of priorities for action.

Let me counterbalance that by mentioning some of the other actions that have been taken. An association of general commissioners for the London area is well on its way to formation and it is hoped that other areas will join in. Revised interim notes for the guidance of general commissioners have been prepared and issued in Northern Ireland. They will be issued in England and Wales in the near future. These notes stress the importance of not only being independent but being seen to be independent. They also stress the need to give an appellant full opportunity to put his case. A copy of these interim notes will be placed in the Library.

With the introduction of general commissioners in Northern Ireland, a training programme for them has been set up involving sitting in with a special commissioner, attendance at seminars, shadow meetings when cases have been put up for consideration and visits to meetings in this country. The Judicial Studies Board has been invited to consider training for general commissioners and will do so through its tribunals sub-committee when time allows. The Association of Clerks to Commissioners is to consider a code of good conduct for its members. The Lord Chancellor is also giving thought to other means whereby he can be satisfied that the independence of general commissioners is safe and apparent.

As my hon. Friend will have noted, I have not commented in great detail on the individual case that is the background to the debate, but I have dealt in some detail with the matters of general principle. With regard to the specific case, the Lord Chancellor was satisfied that there were insufficient grounds for him to intervene in the case. He has set out his reasons, however, in considerable detail in a private letter to my hon. Friend and, through him, to his constituent.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 21 April 1989

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Maryhill Community Care Scheme

9.35 am

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I beg to present a petition from supporters of the Maryhill community care scheme, which has been endorsed by 1,000 signatures gathered at Maryhill and backed by members of Gairbraid church, St. Gregory's church, the Maryhill elderly forum, the Strathclyde elderly forum, the Forum on Disability, Age Concern, the Gairbraid tenants' association, Wyndford community council, Gairbraid community flat and local branches of the Transport and General Workers Union, the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the National Union of Mineworkers. It has also been supported by local councillors and, needless to say, by me.

The substance of the petition is

"That a great disservice will be done to the needs and interests of many isolated, elderly and disabled people who have relied on the Maryhill community care scheme since 1984. The scheme has now closed because it does not meet the Government's criteria for funding and no other source of finance is there.

Wherefor your petitioners pray that your Honourable House ask the Secretary of State for Employment and the Secretary of State for Scotland to re-examine the criteria for funding, and meanwhile allow the scheme interim funds to enable it to continue for at least a short period of three or four months. Therefore your petitioners, as in duty bound, pray that the House accepts the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Concessionary TV Licence

9.37 am

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I beg to present a petition from citizens of New Parks estate and from people in the city of Leicester, designed to change the present extraordinary anomaly whereby pensioners who live in warden-assisted accommodation obtain television licences at an annual fee of £5, while others who do not have the benefit of such assistance usually pay the full fee.

"The humble Petition of citizens of the New Parks estate and of the city of Leicester showeth, that whereas for people who are elderly and disabled a television set is no luxury but often their main contact with outside life and shield against loneliness; whereas elderly and disabled people suffer greatly from inadequate pensions and other benefits; and whereas licence concessions are made for some pensioners and disabled people who live in council bungalows or sheltered accommodation; wherefor your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will call upon Her Majesty's Government to remove the burden of television licence fees from old age pensioners and people who are registered as disabled; or in the alternative that Her Majesty's Government will extend privileges at present linmited to specific pensioners and disabled people who are in straitened circumstances; who are at present struggling to survive financially; for whom the dignity and quality of life is inadequate; and for whom the cost of television licences is unwarranted and a great burden." The petition is signed by more than 500 citizens, and by me.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Right of Reply Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

9.40 am

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I refer you to page 1136 of the Amendment Paper. Amendment No. 29 deals with the *Official Report*. You have not selected that amendment for debate. I do not seek to challenge your judgment. It may be that when you read the Bill you observed, as I did, that clause 1(1) referred merely to a periodical. A periodical, as defined by "The Concise Oxford Dictionary", is something that is "published at regular intervals." It appears that the *Official Report* is likely to be caught, in any event, by the terms of the Bill. That raises a question of privilege. I am wondering whether the proceedings on the Bill should be deferred until the Committee of Privileges has had a chance to examine the question.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member is making that allegation, he must raise it with me in the normal way.

Mr. Knight: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept without question that when one raises a breach of privilege the matter must be raised in writing, but I am saying that this is an anticipated breach. Should the Bill ultimately become an Act, that could constitute a breach of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member must table a motion to that effect. We have known for a long time that the Bill would be debated today. If the hon. Gentleman sincerely thought that this was a question of privilege, he should have raised it with me before.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are you able to say whether it is the intention of the Solicitor-General or the Attorney-General to grace us with their presence this morning? There may be an announcement about Mr. Justice Hoffmann's proposals, which would allow for speedier and cheaper resolution of disputes concerning the law of defamation. Many of the right hon. and hon. Members who support the measure believe that the cost of defamation proceedings is so great that it is impossible for a private citizen to take on a newspaper. If Mr. Justice Hoffmann's proposals were to be implemented, many right hon. and hon. Members might reconsider their position on the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman used the word "if." As the hon. Gentleman said, it has not yet happened. It is a premature point of order.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may help us to make progress—this is the difference between my point of order and the others—if I were to intimate to you that I should be willing to accept——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No, not at this stage. If the hon. Gentleman mentions which amendments he is prepared to accept when we reach them, I am sure that that would expedite the proceedings on his Bill.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) and arising also from the amendment that stands in my name, Mr. Speaker. If our reading of the Bill is correct and the term "periodical" encompasses the *Official Report* of both this House and the other place, does not an issue of privilege arise concerning the other place? If that is so, should not the other place have been informed that this House is considering a matter that affects its privilege? Has the other place been so informed?

Mr. Speaker: That is another hypothetical matter. As the House would expect, I have been through the Bill and the amendments with the greatest of care and I think that I have been generous in my selection of amendments. They are all absolutely valid points and we should get on with them.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not seek to challenge your ruling in response to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). You said that we should wait until we reached the amendments. However, it would be helpful if the House understood from the outset that my hon. Friend is the chief sponsor and promoter of the Bill and that he is prepared to accept all the amendments in groups 4, 7, 8 and 9.

Mr. Speaker: That is a helpful suggestion. However, let us now get on.

New Clause 4

PRESS COMMISSION APPEAL TRIBUNAL

'(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint a panel of members of the Commission to sit as the Press Commission Appeal Tribunal ("the Appeal Tribunal").

(2) The provisions of Part II of the Schedule to this Act shall have effect with respect to the Appeal Tribunal.

(3) A party to a decision of the Commission may, within 28 days of being notified of that decision, appeal to the Appeal Tribunal; and on any such appeal the Appeal Tribunal may—

(a) affirm the decision of the Commission, or

(b) make any other determination which could have been made by the Commission.

(4) The Secretary of State may make rules—

(a) regulating appeals to the Appeal Tribunal;

(b) prescribing the practice and procedure to be followed on or in connection with appeals to the Appeal Tribunal, including the mode and burden of proof and admissibility of evidence to be received by the Appeal Tribunal and circumstances in which the Appeal Tribunal may hold an oral enquiry; and

(c) providing for other matters preliminary or incidental to or arising out of appeals to and decisions made by the Appeal Tribunal.

(5) The power to make rules under subsection (4) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument; and a statutory instrument containing such rules shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Greg Knight: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 73, in clause 4, page 2, line 35, at end insert:

'subject to an appeal under section *(Press Commission Appeal Tribunal)*.'.

No. 91, in page 2, line 35, at end insert:

'subject to the right of either party to appeal to the High Court or to the Court of Session in Scotland within 28 days of the decision being made. The decision of the High Court or of the Court of Session shall be final.'.

No. 100, in page 2, line 35, at end insert:

'subject to the right of either party to appeal decisions to the High Court, or the Court of Session in Scotland.'.

No. 33, in schedule, in page 4, line 39, at end add:

'If the panel determines that the complainant has not established a right under section 1 of this Act, the complainant shall have the right to appeal against that decision to the full Commission'.

No. 75, in page 4, line 39, at end add:

PART II

The Press Commission Appeal Tribunal

11. A panel of at least 3 Commissioners shall sit as necessary as the Appeal Tribunal to determine appeals.

12. No member of the Commission shall be appointed to the Appeal Tribunal until at least six months after his appointment to the Commission.

13. A person who is no longer a member of the Commission shall cease to be a member of the Appeal Tribunal.

14. The Secretary and other officers appointed under Part I of this Schedule to assist the Commission shall assist the Appeal Tribunal in carrying out its duties.'.

Mr. Worthington: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may be helpful if I say that I am willing to accept new clause 4 and amendment No. 75.

Mr. Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) to speak to his new clause with that in mind.

9.45 am

Mr. Knight: I am grateful for what the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has said. However, I am in some difficulty because I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Mr. Watts) and for Keighley (Mr. Waller) are not convinced that the new clause is necessary. I must, therefore, place on record the reasons why the new clause should be added to the Bill. In doing so, I hope that I can persuade them to join the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie and me in supporting the new clause.

I should make my position clear from the outset. I oppose the Bill, but I do not rise to defend the worst excesses of Fleet street and Wapping. I am not saying that everything is perfect with the British press. I remind the House that this is not merely a debating Chamber. It is a legislative Chamber. The House must consider what would happen if the Bill became law.

In my view, the Bill is a dangerous threat to press freedom. It would undermine editorial direction and stifle investigative journalism. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is a barrister-at-law and I have to tell him that in my view a newspaper is more than a mere passive receptacle or conduit for news, comment and advertising. The choice of the material to go into a newspaper and decisions as to the limitations on size and content of the newspaper— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) is trying to make a serious speech about new clause 4 in the face of barracking, noise and laughter. Press freedom is a serious matter. Press freedom is at stake. I want to hear what my hon. Friend is saying. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are shouting out, even now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I hope that the House will listen to the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight).

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) is moving his new clause, although my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has already said that he accepts it, so what is the point of making a speech about it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Let us get on with the debate.

Mr. Greg Knight: As usual, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) can only be half awake at this hour in the morning. When I rose to my feet I made it clear that it is all very well for the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie to say that he accepts my new clause, but I know that there are serious reservations on the Conservative Benches about—*[Interruption.]* I am seeking to persuade——

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Skinner: He is being paid £60,000 to come here this morning.

Mr. Tebbit: I cannot imagine that anybody would ever pay the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) anything to turn up anywhere. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure whether you can hear me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on my point of order, but I could not hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) was saying because of the barracking of a number of Opposition Members who do not respect a free press and do not, furthermore, respect free speech in this House. Could you be so kind as to ensure that the debate is conducted in a manner in which I, at least, can hear what my hon. Friend is saying?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that we shall get off to a good start on these important debates and that the House will listen to the hon. Member for Derby, North, who has the Floor.

Mr. Knight: Before the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch appeared to have a fit, I was saying that a newspaper was more than a passive receptacle or conduit for news, comment and advertising. The choice of material and the decisions about the size and content of a paper and the treatment of public issues, public officials and politicians, whether fair or unfair, involve the exercise of editorial control and judgment. I have yet to be convinced that Government regulation of that crucial process can be exercised consistent with a free press.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): My hon. Friend mentioned that some Conservative Members had expressed reservations about new clause 4. Does he agree that the Bill is using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, given that there are 1,800 provincial newspapers, many of which are held in high regard in the constituencies of hon. Members on both sides of the House for the way in which they report local affairs?

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that when he has heard my arguments, he will decide that if we have to have the Bill it will be better with the addition of new clause 4. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members keep

[Mr. Knight]

shouting that it has been accepted, but I will repeat for the third time that although the promoter of the Bill has been persuaded that he should accept new clause 4, I am surrounded by hostile hon. Friends who do not accept the need for new clause 4 and intend to divide the House. I am seeking to persuade my hon. Friends that they should not do that and that new clause 4 should be added to the Bill.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I understand that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) is prepared to accept only amendment No. 75 and new clause 4, both of which I have put my name to and I am pleased that he is prepared to accept them, but the only basis on which the Bill would be acceptable to me would be if the other amendments in the group, providing for an appeal to the courts, were also accepted. If there is not to be an appeal to the courts, a radically different approach to the group of amendments and the issues they raise is necessary.

Mr. Knight: I realise that I have to add my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) to the list of my hon. Friends who are unhappy about the new clause. I hope to persuade them otherwise during my speech.

It would be easy for opponents of the Bill to take a negative attitude and merely seek to divide the House on Third Reading, but I hope that the House will realise that we are trying to be constructive and improve the Bill. If the amendments are accepted, I hope that the Bill will be more acceptable to the House.

Before developing my argument in support of new clause 4, I congratulate the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie on the good-natured and fair way in which he steered the Bill through Committee. Even his opponents recognised his good nature and courtesy in Committee. He has been more good natured than some of my hon. Friends. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) will join us this morning, but ever since we concluded our proceedings in Committee, I have kept bumping into him in corridors and hearing him moan about the worst excesses of Fleet street. I hope that we shall have the pleasure of his company later.

Although the Government have made it clear that they are neutral, I hope that two of my hon. Friends who are Ministers will attend the debate, and although they cannot take part, will join me in the Division Lobby. I am referring to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, who has said that he agrees with most of my amendments to the Bill. I have not discussed the matter with my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic, but on reading through the *Official Report*, I noticed that during the debate on the Parking Bill he said:

> "I look forward to attending the historic towns forum that is to take place . . . However I may wish to return early so that I may be negatively neutral on the Right of Reply Bill. Given my job, if I had a formal right of reply, half the newspapers would be full of items explaining that they had misunderstood me. I am one of the more misunderstood Ministers".—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 520.]

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): While on the subject of those who are misunderstood, what representations has my hon. Friend received from my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)?

Mr. Knight: I was rather surprised not to receive any representations from my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). I have not seen him in the House for quite some time, perhaps because the House has not been considering matters that the Government consider particularly contentious. Perhaps that is the reason for my right hon. Friend's absence.

Mr. Watts: He is advertising cheese.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend the Member for Slough informs me that one of the reasons for my right hon. Friend's absence is that he is currently advertising cheese products on television.

New clause 4 introduces the right of appeal, which can be exercised by either party against the press commission to a press commission appeal tribunal which may affirm the original decision or make any other determination. The new clause also gives the Secretary of State powers to make rules to regulate the practices and procedures to be followed in connection with appeals. My hon. Friends may ask why we need an appeals procedure. I remind the House that the Bill as drafted gives powers of High Court enforcement. I consider that the Bill's provisions for the hearing of evidence are entirely unacceptable, and that an appeals procedure should be provided.

The Bill does not provide a right to be heard in person by the commission. It does not even provide a right to be legally represented, and parties are not required to give evidence under oath. Therefore, it is clear that there will be no right to cross-examination or to the examination of any relevant documents.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is making a very interesting case, but will he address a fundamental point that worries me? The very first line of new clause 4 refers to the Secretary of State. Many Conservative Members are worried that because of the excesses of two or three national titles, the 1,850 regional daily and weekly newspapers, which do a good job and try to act responsibly, may be clobbered. Much as we regret the excesses of one or two national titles, Conservative Members are fundamentally committed to press freedom and we are not convinced that my hon. Friend's new clause, in fiddling around with the Bill, will in any way improve it or address that problem.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The main answer to his question is that the Bill should be opposed, but, as I said a few moments ago, we are considering a Bill on Report and I felt that it was more constructive to seek to alleviate some of the problems that the Bill will cause than simply to oppose it. My hon. Friend referred to clobbering the press. If he reads new clause 4, he will realise that it seeks to alleviate the clobbering of the press by providing a right of appeal.

Mr. Watts: I have been listening very carefully to my hon. Friend's development of his argument. Subsection (1) of new clause 4 states that the appeal body should be composed of a panel of members of the commission. Is that not the same as having the right of appeal against the refusal of planning permission to a panel of members of the planning committee which refused the application in the first place? Is it not a vicious circle into which those who fall into the clutches of the commission will be bound ever more tightly? How will the appeal be independent? Is it not a mere charade and facade?

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend has been rather harsh in his criticism. One hopes that those appointed will be responsible and independently minded people who have some knowledge of the working of the newspaper industry and who, therefore, would exercise their judgment freely when asked to review a decision of the full commission.

10 am

Mr. Tebbit: I am not happy about new clause 4, because it seems merely to complicate the Bill without giving any real assurance of the freedom of the press. The debate is about appointing a press commission, not a right of reply board. I disagree with my hon. Friend over whether the commissioners, or whatever we choose to call them, should sit on appeals against their own judgments. I think, as my hon. Friend does, that the commissioners would be responsible men and women and, after all, it should not be my hon. Friend who is criticising this but Opposition Members. They claim frequently that there can be no proper appeal or investigation of matters, for example concerning the police, because the police conduct the inquiries themselves. We always say that the police, like the commissioners, are honourable men and women who can be trusted to do a proper job. I hope that my hon. Friend will explain how the appeals will be conducted. Will they be conducted with barristers, lawyers, and cross-examination? How will they work?

Mr. Knight: I shall deal with my right hon. Friend's first point now and his other point later. I do not think that he chose a good analogy when he referred to complaints initiated against the police. In that instance, a police officer from another constabulary will carry out the investigation. I am not suggesting that editors from another newspaper should sit on the appeal board. It will consist of people appointed by the Secretary of State and they would not necessarily be editors who are currently in charge of a newspaper. Therefore, that point was not particularly valid.

Mr. Tebbit: My hon. Friend has missed my point. The appeals procedure he is setting up is not for appeals against the view of editors but for someone who wants to appeal against the decision of the commissioners. Yet the commissioners will be sitting on that appeals board. The Bill stinks. The concept of commissioners being appointed by the state to govern the press is anathema to most Conservative Members. However, my hon. Friend missed my point and perhaps he will deal with it in a little more detail now.

Mr. Knight: I understand my right hon. Friend's point. I would not envisage that a commissioner who sat on the original hearing would be one of the commissioners sitting on the appeal. If my right hon. Friend is thinking, "Well, new clause 4 does not say that", I should point out that the new clause makes it clear that there are to be rules laid down by the Secretary of State to determine the manner of the hearing of the appeals and other matters ancillary thereto.

I am hoping—no doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will make it clear when he replies—that such things would be dealt with in the rules. I accept that there may be criticism and that some of my hon. Friends may think that I should have added the rules to the new clause. I thought that the matter should be reflected upon in the light of today's debate. Therefore, when I drafted the new clause I wanted it to allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider our debate and then formulate the rules. I want to give my right hon. Friend some flexibility in the light of our proceedings.

Mr. Gow: There is an important point to which my hon. Friend has not referred. Under new clause 4 some members of the commission will be allowed to hear an appeal. My hon. Friend has told the House that the commissioners will be appointed by the Secretary of State. However, when reference is made in the Bill to "Secretary of State" does that not mean any Secretary of State, so that, for example, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales could appoint commissioners? Why does my hon. Friend have greater confidence in the ability of the Secretary of State for Wales to choose commissioners than in his judgment on monetary and economic matters?

Mr. Knight: If the commissioners were to be appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, I hope that he would appoint my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, because it would at least give him something useful to do with his time.

Clause 4(4) forces the commission to deal properly with any complaint. Hon. Members will know that it must give a decision within 28 days of receiving a complaint unless, according to the Bill,

"it is not reasonably practicable to do so within that time limit."

It does not say to whom it must be "reasonably practicable". Is it to one of the parties, both the parties, or the commission? The 28-day period does not allow time for correspondence, let alone consideration of the evidence.

Mr. Batiste: My hon. Friend is coming to what I think is one of the fundamental flaws in the concept of the Bill and I am interested to know how he will deal with it. If there is a voluntary system, it could—though it does not in the case of the Press Council—operate quickly and effectively. When one moves, as the Bill does, in the direction of statutory rights, one needs statutory protection as well. As the role of the press commission develops, we shall lose all its informality, flexibility and potential for speed because of the inevitable need to protect the rights of both parties involved.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend has made a valid point. I think that he may be coming round to the view that there should be an appeals procedure to remedy any injustice that occurs. I hope that that is his ultimate conclusion.

Mr. Batiste: My first preference would have been that the remedy should lie in an accelerated procedure to county courts in the first instance rather than to the press commission. Having regard to the strong feelings expressed in the Bill that matters should be dealt with through a press commission, I would go along with that as long as there is the opportunity to appeal within it and then the ultimate appeal to the courts.

Mr. Knight: I am grateful for that clarification.

I remind the House that the commission is given further power to order a right of reply where it feels that a newspaper has not responded with sufficient urgency to allow the commission to make a judgment within 28 days of the receipt of the complaint. However, nowhere in the

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Bill is there any definition of what is "sufficient urgency". The procedure contained in the Bill has nothing to do with justice but everything to do with making a quick decision.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): In order for justice to be done in such cases as would arise under the Bill, it is essential that there should be a speedy right of reply. A right of reply that happens months after the original statement is made will serve no useful purpose for the person who has been libelled by the newspaper. Therefore, I oppose the new clause because it will make the procedure even longer than the system proposed in the Bill. Speed is of the essence in any right of reply.

Mr. Knight: We all agree with that. However, I hope that, in his pursuit of speed, my hon. Friend is not willing to sacrifice justice. That is my fear.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: That is all very well, but one has to look at what the Bill is seeking to achieve. It seeks to give somebody who has been accused in a factually incorrect manner of having done something, or of being something that he is not, a right of reply to put the opposite case. That is all the Bill is trying to achieve. My hon. Friend talks about justice. The amount of inaccurate rubbish that one reads in national newspapers these days is so appalling that surely it must be right for the House to take the view that somebody should be able to rebut it and that the editors of the newspapers should have a duty to publish that rebuttal.

Mr. Knight: Yes, but I do not know from where people will be found to sit on the commission who are infallible. I am worried that the commissioners may make a mistake, and under the Bill as it is drafted no remedy is available, except an expensive legal process.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): My hon. Friend mentioned the importance of justice, about which I entirely agree, but does he accept that it often tends to be expensive? Under the new clause, the appeal procedure being proposed will be expensive for not only appellants but defendants. Who will pay the costs of the appeal procedure? Who will pay the costs of newspapers against which complaints of little substance have been made?

Mr. Knight: New clause 4 is far less expensive than some of the other appeal procedures, such as an appeal to the High Court.

Mr. Leigh: Does my hon. Friend realise that he is getting himself into an awful muddle? Supporters of the Bill, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), say that speed, simplicity and cheapness are of the essence. My hon. Friend is trying to impose a quasi-judicial appeal procedure on what should be a simple and rapid system.

Mr. Knight: I am not in an awful muddle. I am trying to drive a course down the middle between my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who are on opposing sides. Surely we can achieve a compromise between no appeal procedure and the only available alternative of the High Court.

Mr. Leigh: In trying to drive down the middle, is not my hon. Friend beginning to understand that the Bill is fundamentally flawed because it is impossible to drive a middle course? There must either be a legal procedure, which we have enjoyed in this country and which protects individual rights, or a statutory procedure. A quasi-judicial process cannot be imposed on a statutory procedure, which is the problem facing my hon. Friend.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend and I are at one in our views of the Bill. Some of my hon. Friends may not have heard because of the racket emanating from the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch, but at the outset I said that I opposed the Bill. New clause 4 finds a middle way and improves what I still regard as a defective Bill. My hon. Friend's excessive pleading for the existing system of justice is tinged by the fact that he is a member of the legal profession and may fear that if the new clause were passed it would deprive lawyers of their fat appeal fees. I say that, without malice, as a lawyer.

Mr. Batiste: I am relieved that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) shares my concern about this matter. As a lawyer, I say that we do not wish to perpetuate the system, but from our long experience we know that injustice arises when one tries to take short cuts. One may be able to make summary decisions in many instances about a factual inadequacy, but in many circumstances the issues will be extremely complex, such as allegations of fraud or malpractice that fall short of criminality. I do not understand how a statutory procedure under which qualified lawyers cannot operate, which has no power to call evidence under oath and to subpoena witnesses or documents, can possibly achieve justice in such complex cases. The fabric of the Bill is based on simple cases and ignores the complex.

Mr. Knight: I am not sure that my hon. Friend makes a good point. The new clause provides for new rules to be laid in due course. I expect them to contain requirements for the calling of witnesses and oral hearings at which witnesses can be cross-examined. We are debating not an investigation into complex fraud matters but a factual inaccuracy in a newspaper to which someone is seeking a right of reply.

Mr. Batiste: If a newspaper implies, for example, that a second-hand car dealer has been guilty of malpractice, whether or not criminality is implied at the same time, the issues could be complex.

Mr. Knight: I take my hon. Friend's point. When the rules are laid in due course, I expect them to make provision for the legal representation of both parties appearing before the tribunal. I hope that the Home Office will agree, but I believe that the rules should make such provision.

10.15 am

Mr. Watts: Does my hon. Friend accept that he is being a little naive in expecting that the issues that will fall to be determined by the commission will be clear cut? Surely there is hardly a newspaper in the country that would not be prepared to correct a simple and straightforward inaccuracy. Complaints will arise when facts are disputed and cannot be readily established. In such circumstances, the issues involved will be similar to those in a libel case.

Mr. Knight: I am not sure that my hon. Friend is right. Contention will arise not just on whether a statement of fact is accurate but under clause 1(1)(l), which says that the factual inaccuracy must be such that

"any reasonable person might deem to be damaging to the character, reputation or good standing of that person or body of persons."

Most challenges will be to that part of clause 1(1).

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): Despite my hon. Friend's explanation, does he agree that the establishment of what is a fact is much more complex? Is it not true that in the Chamber, day after day, we dispute so-called facts? Will that not now be carried over into the press?

Mr. Knight: According to the Oxford dictionary, a fact is something that is

"certainly known to have occurred or be true".

On appeal, it will be not a particular fact but the effect of a factual inaccuracy that will be in contention.

Mr. Tebbit: My hon. Friend is in deep difficulty. Let us consider cases alleging misdoing in the City, such as insider trading. Initially, such accusations frequently surface in the press. Is my hon. Friend suggesting that if someone took such allegations to the press commission, required a newspaper to set the record straight and publish a correction, the commission would be able to come to a conclusion without an examination as rigorous as if someone were charged with a criminal offence and appeared at the Old Bailey? Such proceedings, especially given that my hon. Friend has said that lawyers should become involved, could go on not for days or weeks but for years, as some major fraud cases do. The press commission itself would not work, let alone the appeal committee of three unfortunate perhaps not legally qualified men or women sitting on an appeal, on a matter that already had been before the commission for two or three years.

Mr. Knight: My right hon. Friend has raised an interesting point, especially as the Bill does not explain what the burden of proof before the commission should be. I have proceeded so far on the assumption that the person making the complaint would need to prove his case beyond reasonable doubt, but the commissioners may take a wholly different view. I accept what my right hon. Friend has said on that, but I should have thought that if the Bill became law, there would be an incentive for editors to ensure that they had the correct facts at their fingertips before they proceeded to publish an article. If they were unable to show that they had the factual details to hand, I would expect to see them lose before the commission and the right to reply to be given.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): No one expects anything better from the general run of the miserable rabble of mediocrities who are conducting this charade, but would the hon. Gentleman agree that it is sad and pathetic to find a former Secretary of State reduced to the level of Friday morning filibusterer? Could the hon. Gentleman arrange among his colleagues for a £10 a head whip round to give the former Secretary of State a sense of being of more central importance in life?

Mr. Knight: I should not have given way to the hon. Gentleman. What is rather pathetic is that, although the Labour party has said that it supports the Bill wholeheartedly, I observe that there are only a small number of Labour Members in the Chamber at the moment.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend note the incongruity that Opposition Members argue that there should be a statutory right of reply against factual inaccuracies, yet they have advanced their case this morning only by heaping abuse on those who happen to disagree with them? Does my hon. Friend consider that there is some ambiguity in their approach which reinforces our real fear that the Bill is an Opposition attempt to gag the press?

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is right. I shall now return to the argument I was developing a few moments ago. Despite the composition and powers of the commission under the Bill, no right of appeal is contained in it. The only appeal open to aggrieved parties would be by way of a judicial review in the High Court.

Mr. Watts: I thought that my hon. Friend was going to elaborate further on his reply to our right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). My hon. Friend has left me confused about his view on the burden of proof required. He started by saying that the complainant would need to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that the facts were as stated and that damage had been suffered. He then said that he would expect the newspaper to be able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that it had a factual basis for its article. I thought that he left the matter in mid air because of the intervention by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). My hon. Friend leaves me up in the air. I am not clear what he considers should be the burden of proof when appeal is heard by the tribunal.

Mr. Knight: The reason that I left my hon. Friend in the air was that the Bill leaves the issue in the air. The Bill is badly drafted and does not state what the burden of proof should be. I left the matter in the air because I was merely speculating about how the process might operate. My hon. Friend is right. Where does the burden of proof lie? Does it lie with the complainant or the newspaper? We do not know, because the Bill does not tell us. That is why I began my remarks by saying that I was opposed to the Bill. Its drafting is awful, because it does not resolve the issue. If it is the will of the House that, bad as it is, the Bill should proceed, we should graft onto it a right of appeal which may not be perfect but would seem to remedy some of the difficulties that would, undoubtedly, arise should the Bill become law.

As I said before my hon. Friend the member for Slough intervened, the only way that someone could challenge a decision by the commission would be by applying for a judicial review. That is a wholly inappropriate method of appealing against decisions by the press commission. It would mean that a party would have to show that the commission had acted ultra vires, had misinterpreted the law, or acted wholly unreasonably in the circumstances. That cannot be to the benefit of either the complainant or the newspaper or periodical.

I was delighted to see that point picked up by Mr. Bernard Levin in an excellent article in *The Times* on 18 April in which he said, referring to the press commission:

"And the "judgements" of this kangaroo court are final: there is no form of appeal (for either side), and anyone who is dissatisfied by a ruling has no recourse other than to go to

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the courts for judicial review, which inevitably means that only millionaires can afford to seek justice from this appalling contraption."

Hear, hear. Mr. Bernard Levin has got it right. It is an appalling contraption and to allow an appeal only by way of a judicial review will not remedy the defects that the Bill's promoter, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie, talked about in Committee. He said that the Bill was intended to be a way of achieving cheap justice so that the common man could have the facts put right. If the Bill allows an appeal only by way of judicial review, only someone like Tiny Rowlands will be able to seek to have decisions overturned. The man on the Clapham omnibus will be left facing an injustice if the comission decides unfairly against him.

Mr. Leigh: Does my hon. Friend know of any appeal procedure in our jurisdiction where the members of the appeal tribunal are drawn from the court of first instance? Is that not the worrying and serious point that Conservative Members are trying to address? This is not a charade; it is a serious matter of press freedom and upsetting traditional judicial procedures. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) is in the newspaper business himself—the working man's Murdoch, although he did not declare an interest. We are obliged to submit the Bill to the closest possible scrutiny. How can my hon. Friend meet the point that the members of the appeal tribunal made the decision in the first place? Does that conform with the principles of natural justice in this country? Of course not.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is rather overstating the case. I would not expect to see the panel for the appeal composed of those commissioners who took part in the original decision. Let me give an analogy. If a police officer is charged with a disciplinary offence, he has an ultimate right of appeal to the Home Secretary. It could be argued that the Home Secretary has an interest in the matter because he is responsible for the police in the first instance. My hon. Friend's fears are not as weighty as he would have the House believe. A system of appeals to review certain decisions is a familiar part of society today.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I want to pursue the matter further. The analogy with the police is not satisfactory. It is suggested that of the 21 commissioners, three should be taken out. To speak about them as though they would be a wholly separate group, as one police force is separate from another, is wrong. The commission will be a small and coherent group of individuals. To say that three of them will question the decisions of the other 18 is an absurd proposition.

Mr. Knight: It is not absurd. We are discussing intelligent and independently minded people who will have the interests of the press at heart and a desire to see justice done. The situation will not be as bad as my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Leigh: We can only deal with the new clause as it appears on the amendment paper. It does not make it crystal clear that someone who has heard a case in the court of first instance will not also hear it on appeal. That is the fundamental problem. Could we not use the more traditional way of going about things and provide for appeals to the High Court? Surely that would be preferable to people sitting in judgment on their colleagues.

10.30 am

Mr. Knight: As the debate proceeds, I realise that it was perhaps an error not to include in the new clause the rules that I envisaged that the Secretary of State would ultimately lay. I have every confidence in my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary——

Mr. Watts: That is not good enough.

Mr. Knight: I would expect proper rules to be laid in due course to provide for a fair system of appeals. If that does not happen, there is no point in providing for rules to be laid in the first place.

Mr. Watts: May I suggest to my hon. Friend a way out of this difficulty? Could he not table a manuscript amendment to make it clear that no commissioner who had taken part in the original proceedings should be allowed to be part of the panel that would consider an appeal against that decision? Might not that be a way forward if Mr. Deputy Speaker were prepared to accept a manuscript amendment at this stage?

Mr. Knight: I am not prepared to table a manuscript amendment at this stage. Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me to develop my theme and explain the reasons behind the new clause. Then, if I have not convinced him by the end of the debate, and if he wishes to table a manuscript amendment, I shall not seek to divide the House. I expect these matters to be properly dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in due course. On reflection, I do not think that it would be right and proper for me to set down the rules in the new clause, because the rules should be laid after careful consideration.

Mr. Batiste: As my hon. Friend knows, I support new clause 4, although I have some reservations about the way in which it might work. If we decide against the initial court proposal, we should use the model of industrial tribunals and the employment appeal tribunals as a structure that would be generally acceptable in dealing with the matter. The difficulty that we face is that the membership of industrial tribunals is much more circumscribed than is provided for in the Bill and the membership of the employment appeal tribunals is drawn from an entirely different group of people, who do not sit at a court of first instance. Therefore, while I share my hon. Friend's belief that the Minister will come up with a procedure that works very well, it seems to me that the Bill would prohibit the Minister from putting in place a structure that has proved satisfactory elsewhere.

Mr. Knight: I agree with my hon. Friend's comments about the structure of the Bill; it is a badly drafted Bill. I know that my hon. Friends are still not happy about this point, but the Home Office has experience in such matters. We have a system of immigration appeals with rules laid down by the Home Office, and I have every confidence in the ability of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to deal with the matter properly and fairly. I know that he will try to ensure that justice is done on appeal.

The Bill provides for the press commission to issue guidance on the question of editorial standards.

Mr. Tebbit: What?

Mr. Knight: It is there in the Bill. I do not like it, any more than my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) likes it. The press commission's advice on such matters would be better received by the press if it arose from case histories that had been subject to scrutiny by the press commission appeal tribunal that the new clause seeks to establish.

Mr. Batiste: I hope that my hon. Friend will not seek to justify the new clause with reference to the later guideline provisions. An amendment in my name, which has been selected for debate, seeks to strike out that part of the Bill, which seems to me to lay down a framework for censorship.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is right. I, too, would like that provision to be deleted from the Bill. I am proceeding on the assumption that that will not happen and that we are lumbered with it and I have tabled the new clause to make it more palatable.

As I have said to my hon. Friends, there are precedents in the immigration procedure and the police disciplinary appeals procedure. I believe that there is also a system of appeal under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975.

I take a fairly flexible view of the rules that I should expect my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to lay. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister——

Mr. Leigh: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) has made an important point. You will be aware that amendment No. 50 deals with a vital matter—the guidelines on editorial freedom. In view of the importance of that amendment, might it not be convenient if our proceedings on the new clause were suspended so that we could debate amendment No. 50? We could return to the new clause thereafter. Interesting though I find the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet is important. It goes to the core of the Bill and the points about which we are worried. We have limited time and we want to discuss these matters. Would you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, consider suspending our proceedings on the new clause and returning to it later?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that we had better get on with the debate. If we proceed along the lines suggested by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), we shall soon get into a great muddle.

Mr. Knight: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that I have been extremely generous in giving way to my hon. Friends, and perhaps I should try to make some progress. I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) has entered the Chamber. I hope that he is here to give me his support on this important matter.

Mr. Gow: Having welcomed my hon. Friend the member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), will my hon. Friend the Member for Derby (Mr. Knight) now give way to him?

Mr. Knight: If my hon. Friend wishes to intervene, I shall be happy to give way, even though he is wearing a rather garish jacket.

Mr. Gow: I cannot allow that to pass without comment. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley is impeccably dressed, as always. I hope that my hon. Friend will withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Knight: My remarks were not intended as a slur but merely a comment on the fact that my hon. Friend's taste is different from mine. I shall not get sidetracked into discussing my hon. Friend's dress. Perhaps I should not have made the remark in the first place.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend has referred several times to the rules being laid by the Secretary of State for the Home Department. He also referred by analogy to immigration appeals tribunals. But the control of the rules for those tribunals is a matter for the Lord Chancellor, and for a very good reason. Any proceedings before any appeal tribunal are, in essence, judicial proceedings and should come under the senior Law Officer in the Government—the head of the judiciary—and not a departmental Minister whose other responsibilities may well conflict with his duty to ensure that a free and fair judicial procedure is available as envisaged in the new clause.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are not in Committee but on Report, and interventions must be brief.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend the Member for Slough is technically right when he says that the Lord Chancellor has responsibility. However, in drafting the new clause I took the view that, as the Bill deals with the press, and as responsibility for the press is clearly a matter for the Home Office, the Secretary of State for the Home Department would be the appropriate Minister to lay the rules.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Tim Renton): I have been following my hon. Friend's argument closely. The process is as follows. The adjudication officers and the adjudication appeal tribunals are, indeed, appointed by the Lord Chancellor. That system was set up two years ago to show their distinct identity from the Home Office. The Home Office sets and puts the immigration rules before the House, and it is the job of the adjudicators, appointed by the Lord Chancellor's Department, to interpret those immigration rules.

Mr. Knight: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. He has shown that the drafting of the new clause is in order and is not as unusual as my hon. Friend the Member for Slough appeared to think.

I now ask my hon. Friend the Minister several questions. I hope that, when he replies, he can confirm certain matters. Will it be feasible for the rules, when they are laid in due course, to contain provision for costs? I notice that in other matters in which there is a right of appeal the Secretary of State may direct that an appellant pay the whole or any part of his own costs. That is important to deter a frivolous appeal from the decision of the press commission. I hope that the rules will contain a provision to allow costs to be awarded—not necessarily in every case, but when it is right and proper to do so. When an appellant is found to have pursued a frivolous and worthless appeal, he should be condemned in costs. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that it is possible to mention that point in the rules.

Does my hon. Friend consider it appropriate—I certainly do—that the press commission should be

[Mr. Knight]

required to give written reasons for its appeal decisions? That is imperative. The rules under the police disciplinary procedure make it clear that an appellant may attend proceedings, conduct his appeal, or be represented. I hope that that matter will be covered in the rules. It is certainly my intention that anyone who wishes to pursue an appeal should be able to be represented by whomever he chooses —a friend, lawyer or, perhaps, someone else who has knowledge of the newpaper industry.

Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is in order for the rules to require that the appellant or his representative may make oral or written representations in support of the appeal? I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that the rules should state that the appellant may adduce evidence only if it is evidence which, for valid reasons, was not adduced at the original hearing. The appeal procedure should not be a complete re-hearing with new evidence without justification for its being admitted. Such a matter could be contained in the rules made by my hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Batiste: If an original hearing can be conducted on the basis of written representations only, one of the grounds of appeal would be that insufficient weight was given to certain aspects of evidence, or that a conflict between the written evidence given by both sides was inadequately determined and did not follow the weight of the facts. Would it be incumbent on the appeal tribunal to read evidence—perhaps first-hand evidence—on the subject? I hope that my hon. Friend will not suggest that that would be excluded.

Mr. Knight: When I was considering the matter, I noticed that paragraph 26(6) of the 1985 police disciplinary regulations stated:

"The appellant or his representative may make oral or written representations in support of the appeal but may only adduce evidence which could not have been adduced or which was not adduced for reasons which satisfy the person considering the appeal at the hearing at which the charge was found proved."

We need a rule along those lines to prevent a sloppy complaint being made, an appeal being pursued, and evidence being produced on appeal which was readily available at the hearing of the initial complaint before the press commission but which, for no valid reason, was not produced.

Mr. Batiste: I have great difficulty with that proposition. It is inherent in the conflict between having a voluntary procedure and moving to a statutory procedure. My hon. Friend said that he was trying to steer a middle course between the two. If we are trying to have something informal in which people do not need legal representation and have easy access to the press commission, as in many other tribunals, a complainant's initial stab will probably be inept and incomplete, and he may not put in the necessary evidence to do justice to his case.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend has taken us back to something with which the majority of Conservative Members agree. The Bill, is sloppily drafted. It is a requirement that the chairman of an industrial tribunal is a legally qualified person. That being so, the chairman of the tribunal of first instance will guide an unrepresented complainant through his case and try to elicit information which that person would not otherwise have put before the tribunal. The danger with the Bill is that there is no requirement for the chairman of the press commission to be a legally qualified person.

10.45 am

In that case, there may be the problem that the chairman of the press commission will not guide an unrepresented applicant through his case. There is a good argument for the Bill being amended—perhaps in another place—to make it a requirement that the chairman of the press commission is a lawyer. That being so, the problems which my hon. Friend envisages would not arise.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Knight: I have given way a lot. I will give way again, but I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to develop my argument.

Mr. Batiste: As drafted, the Bill specifies some aspects of the composition of the press commission, but it does not specify a legally qualified chairman. Consequently, when my right hon. Friend lays down the rules, he would not be able, in secondary legislation, to specify that the chairman of the commission, panel, or appeal must be a lawyer.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is right to a point. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would not be able to interfere with the chairmanship of the press commission, but, in laying the rules for the hearing of an appeal, he probably could insist that the chairman of the appeal tribunal should, if possible, have legal qualifications. That could be written in the rules. I agree that it would have been far better if the Bill had that requirement in it.

Mr. Leigh: What worries me about what my hon. Friend is saying is that, on a Friday morning, in a throwaway line, he starts laying down rules of evidence. He said that what has not been heard at first instance should not be heard on appeal. As a lawyer, is my hon. Friend aware that the rules of evidence in ordinary judicial courts have taken seven centuries to develop? We will have a voluntary system, a statutory system, or a system of common law. I return to my original point, which I made nearly an hour ago. My hon. Friend is in a muddle.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is a lawyer. I do not know whether he has a blue bag or a red bag. If he has a red bag, it should be taken from him, and he should be given back the blue bag. He has not been listening to what I have been saying. I am not trying to lay down rules of evidence. I ask my hon. Friend to read new clause 4. I have made provision for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to be able to lay rules in due course. I am seeking to elicit from my hon. Friend the Minister what sort of rules he envisages being laid. I am giving him some suggestions.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Knight: I shall give way in a moment, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not make a frivolous intervention. I have given way many times today. No one can accuse me of being ungenerous. However, I want to make progress because there are many other amendments to consider.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that I am seeking today not to

lay down rules of evidence but to make the point that the Secretary of State should be given the power to determine in due course what rules should be made for the appeals commission.

The police disciplinary regulations 1985 state:

"The person considering the appeal may in his discretion admit written evidence which would not be admissible but for this paragraph but which would have been admissible if given orally."

I hope that such a rule will be included in the proposed legislation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet says, we must be flexible and take account of the unrepresented appellant who may, for example, produce documents but forget to ensure the attendance of the author of those documents as a witness.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there are throughout the country many people who are deeply aggrieved by the way in which the British popular press operates? Radio 4 carried an excellent item this morning about the way in which the people or Liverpool have been maligned by *The Sun* journalists in particular and others from the Murdoch empire. Many of those who have been maligned are looking to Parliament today to provide them with an avenue of redress. I refer to ordinary people—not wealthy people or public figures—who look to Parliament to provide them with redress against the gross misuse of power by many sections of the media, including the Murdoch empire.

Many of those people who will be reading of this debate in tomorrow's newspapers will realise that the hon. Gentleman has made a crude attempt to filibuster on behalf of the Murdoch moguls and the Murdoch empire to prevent ordinary people from having redress against gross injustices by the press. Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that ordinary people who are maligned, misrepresented and lied about by journalists should have the right of redress against the media's abuse of power? Why does not the hon. Gentleman bring his contribution to an early close so that other right hon. and hon. Members may contribute to the debate and so that the House will have an opportunity to vote on this important matter?

Mr. Knight: The only crude part of my contribution was my reference to the jacket being worn by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley, which I withdrew.

I did not notice the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) in his place when I started moving new clause 4, so I assume that he missed my opening remarks. I am sorry that he is delaying the proceedings even further, because he compels me en passant to repeat my opening comments. I am not here to defend the worst excesses of Fleet street or of Wapping. However, this is not merely a debating Chamber—we are considering legislation. Even if we accept that the press makes mistakes and that reports appear in the press that are not right, the House has a duty to ask today, "Is this the kind of legislation we want to see on the statute book?" My answer is a resounding no. Having said that, right hon. and hon. Members opposed to the Bill have a duty to be positive and not negative. That is why I seek to graft on to the Bill a right of appeal.

As to the many thousands of people throughout the country that the hon. Gentleman says want something to be done about press abuse, I will gladly let the hon. Gentleman know the address and telephone number of Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper, the new chairman of the Press Council, because the public can pursue such matters through the avenue of a complaint to the council. I have every confidence in Mr. Blom-Cooper, who has made it clear that he wants to revamp the council and make it more effective. He should be given a chance to do just that.

Mr. Batiste: We all share resentment of abuses by some sectors of the press. I can see how the Press Council could provide a remedy against biased or overstated reporting in the tabloid press, but I cannot see how the Bill as drafted could provide any remedy for the people of Liverpool.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot intervene in an intervention.

Mr. Knight: To save time, I gladly give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King).

Mr. King: In Committee, we argued at great length in an attempt to sharpen the Bill. However, the intervention of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) highlights one point to which we have never been given a satisfactory answer. Perhaps my hon. Friend's proposed appeals procedure will deal with this point. I refer to the criticism that the people of Liverpool are unable to seek redress. Would they be able to do so as a body of persons?

Mr. Knight: If I address new clauses 1 and 2, I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would rebuke me. The Bill refers to

"A person or a body of persons"

—meaning an unincorporated association, or a company. One of the other fears shared by many of my hon. and right hon. Friends is that a political party would be able to seek a right of reply. As I understand it, an organisation such as the IRA would be allowed to seek a right of reply to what it regarded as an insulting article. At the end of the day, I should like to see the Bill defeated.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): All kinds of people have said all manner of things about the Hillsborough tragedy, including the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick). I have tried to have my comments reported in the press, but I have not managed to do that. The hon. Member for Hallam made a disgraceful statement that was reproduced in *The Sun* on a major scale. *The Sun* maintains that its report is true. How can we enjoy any redress if moguls such as Murdoch do not allow it? The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) is making remarks on behalf of people like Murdoch.

Mr. Knight: I know that Opposition Members enjoy criticising Rupert Murdoch but it is stretching things a bit far to criticise *The Sun* for accurately reporting the comments of a Member of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) must answer for his own remarks. If the hon. Gentleman is upset by my hon. Friend's remarks, I hope that he will seek to clarify them. However, we cannot criticise the press for accurately reporting hon. Members' remarks.

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) make extremely important points. There is undoubtedly a great deal of hurt and indignation felt on all sides about reports that have appeared in may sections of the press about the Hillsborough tragedy. An inquiry into

[Mr. Tebbit]

that disaster has been commissioned, and it will eventually produce a report and set out what it believes to be the facts. The Bill will require the press commission, within 28 days of receiving a complaint of the type that the hon. Member for Hillsborough might strongly feel justified in making, to reach a conclusion as to the facts of the matter. It would have the power to force a newspaper to publish "facts" that subsequently might be found to be not the true facts. This is a perfect example of the dilemma that I put to my hon. Friend earlier.

Mr. Knight: There is not one hon. Member who regards Hillsborough as anything but a disaster. We are all upset about those who lost their lives, and feel sorrow for their families. There is a good case for maintaining a dignified silence about that tragedy until the inquiry has reported. If it reveals that the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hallam—who is not in his place—were incorrect, I am sure that he will be the first to clarify the position.

Mr. Watts: Can my hon. Friend tell me from his reading of the Bill whether a disputed opinion reported in a newspaper, such as the comments attributed to our hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick), could be considered a factual inaccuracy affecting a person or body of persons, which could include the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery)? My understanding is that it could not. If the newspaper had reported accurately what our hon. Friend said, it cannot be guilty of a factual inaccuracy. Other hon. Gentlemen may have a different opinion, but I cannot see that the Bill would give any redress to the sort of grievance raised by the hon. Member for Hillsborough. Perhaps a sponsor of the Bill would like to seek your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to intervene and clarify the point. It is of considerable interest as two hon. Gentlemen have intervened on the misunderstanding that the Bill would provide redress in those circumstances.

11 am

Mr. Knight: I accept the concern of hon. Gentlemen about the Hillsborough tragedy and it is shared by my hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough is right. The Bill would not help in those circumstances. As I said in my first reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), if *The Sun* accurately reported what an hon Member said, there would be no remedy under the Bill. It is for hon. Members to argue in the House about the opinions expressed.

I am being waylaid into irrelevancies. The Bill is not relevant to that tragedy. I hope to convince the House that if we must have the Bill, we should have an appeals procedure included in it. I know that I have convinced the promoter but that some of my hon. Friends are uneasy about having the Bill at all. I ask them to agree that, if the Bill is to become law, we shall improve it by adding an appeals procedure to it.

Mr. Roger King: I shall welcome some clarification. My hon. Friend's new clause suggests that the claimant would have to go through the right of reply adviser and the press commission, and that if he was not satisfied with the result, he could take his case to appeal. If the applicant had gone to the adviser who had said that he did not have a case, but, as in the recent football tragedy, that person or body of persons felt that they had a case and went to the press commission, which would not accept the case, could they go through the appeals procedure? If those two bodies ruled against his case, could a claimant make an appeal?

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is under some sort of misapprehension about the role of the right of reply adviser. I do not see him as an adjudicator. Clause 5 makes it clear that he is there in the capacity of a sort of Official Solicitor to give advice on how to present a complaint and to assist with it. I do not envisage his having a role in telling someone whether he may pursue his complaint for a right of reply. I think that the intervention was somewhat misplaced.

The right of reply will exist and it will be for the person who makes the complaint to prove that a factual inaccuracy has occurred that has damaged his good standing. If the commission rejects his complaint, although he has had the advice of the right of reply adviser, he would still be at liberty to pursue an appeal. The right of appeal should not be fettered in any way. Perhaps my hon. Friend is thinking of the need for leave to take a case to the House of Lords. This appeals procedure would not work in that way. A complainant, whether a member of the public or a newspaper, will have an absolute right to appeal to the appeals tribunal. Nothing should fetter that right and nothing does fetter that right as the new clause is drafted.

I would expect the rules to provide that, where a frivolous appeal was pursued, there would be power to order costs.

Mr. Stevens: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Knight: I want to draw my remarks to a close, but I give way for the last time.

Mr. Stevens: My hon. Friend is talking about factual inaccuracies. The Bill seems to be limited to factual inaccuracies, but part of the problem may be an omission. Selective reporting of facts or a speech causes the same difficulties, but my hon. Friend does not seem to cover that.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has pinpointed a defect in the Bill. An omission could not be called a factual inaccuracy, so there would be no right of complaint.

This is a bad Bill and I should like to see it defeated, but if we must have it there should be a right of appeal in it. Surely that is reasonable. I hope that the House will reject amendments Nos. 33, 91 and 100. Resort to the courts is superficially attractive, but it would be too slow and too costly. If we include an appeals procedure, the appeals tribunal would specialise and would gain expert knowledge of the matters relating to the Bill. As I said at the outset, I hope that the tribunal will be composed of people with a genuine interest in seeing a healthy press.

I hope that the House will support my new clause, which is reasonable. I notice that the promoter had the good grace at the outset to accept this change, so I hope that we shall not divide and that the House will accept the new clause.

Mr. Worthington: This morning it has been disappointing to see the tactics used by the opponents of the Bill. Many people are sick of the excesses perpetrated by some sections of the press and look to the House to tackle the

issue seriously. It is most disappointing that those who are being obstructive are acting on behalf of people who are virtually journalistic thugs.

Mr. Batiste: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Worthington: I will not play the same games as the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight). I want to advance the debate.

I freely accept that there could be a good case for introducing an appeals procedure. What is most important is that the procedure is quick and deals with relatively simple issues. The Bill provides redress for factual inaccuracies in order to deal with some of the excesses.

I am aware of the risks of interfering with press freedom, but if the press lie, that is a diminution of freedom. If someone with a megaphone shouts, his view will be heard and the person with only his own voice will be drowned out. Rupert Murdoch with a megaphone would be a menace, but Rupert Murdoch in control of large sections of the press is a considerable threat to freedom.

Mr. Batiste: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he does not intend to take interventions during his speech, as is his right. That being the case, many of us may wish to make speeches in order to deal with points that might otherwise have been dealt with in questions to him. I sincerely hope that in those circumstances, Mr. Deputy Speaker, should any requests be made to you by the sponsors of the Bill artificially to terminate the debate, you will bear that point in mind.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The whole House knows that the Chair does not anticipate hypothetical situations.

Mr. Worthington: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The issue of freedom is important. The Bill is centrally concerned with the wrongful exercise of power by the press, but it is my belief that, if we could lay down a yardstick or a benchmark of accuracy, many of the other faults—perhaps of distortion or of bullying—could also be dealt with. Almost every story about which people have complained has had within it that essence of inaccuracy.

I know full well that the Bill does not tackle everything that is wrong with the press at present. That is why I hope that during the debate Conservative Members will allow the Minister to speak, but by their tactics they are denying the Minister that opportunity. I hope that the Minister will respond to what has been the great success of the Bill, which is that it has brought the issue of press abuse of power into the centre of politics. Conservative Members who have spoken are aligning themselves with some very dubious characters, who are abusing their constituents, who are at present subject to the unfettered use of power. The disgraceful thing is that this country is supposed to be a democracy, but, to me, democracy means equality before the law. A feudal state is one in which there are different laws for different classes of people. When it comes to defamation and abuse of the people we have a feudal state, because there is no chance of the ordinary person getting redress from the law. The Minister and Conservative Members have ignored that. Conservative Members have not attempted in this Bill, or at any other time, to address that fundamental denial of civil liberties.

Mr. Waller *rose*——

Mr. Worthington: I shall not give way. It is time for Conservative Members to listen. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about our right of reply?"] The right of reply will come to Conservative Members in due course.

What Conservative Members are ignoring and are giving no appeal against are the kinds of abuse that have been occurring in recent years. In recent times we have heard a lot about how there should be investigative journalism. I would accept that fully, but one of the things that has not happened is investigative journalism by the press of the press. There has been a concealing of some of the outrages that have occurred. One can take as an example the tragic case of Russell Harty. When he was on his death bed window cleaners were being bribed so that cameramen could take pictures of what was happening.

Mr. Roger King: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) is giving us his views on why we should pass his Right of Reply Bill today, but, in fact, we are debating new clause 4, which is about a press commission appeal tribunal. The hon. Gentleman's points have nothing to do with the new clause. I should have thought that, having heard my hon. Friend from Derby, North (Mr. Knight) and if he approves of the clause, he would be anxious to conclude.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is the promoter of the Bill. I am giving him the opportunity to paint the picture before he comes to the new clause, which I am sure he is about to do.

11.15 am

Mr. Leigh: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) dealt specifically with the new clause, which concerns a narrow issue, and much of the debate has been about the legal implications. What we have now is a crude attempt by the promoter of the Bill to get into the tabloid press by talking about Russell Harty. Are we to have a serious debate on the new clause or not?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have given the hon. Gentleman a hint, and I am sure that he is now about to come to the new clause.

Mr. Worthington: I am trying to establish why, in the kind of cases we are dealing with, a right of reply to a matter of factual inaccuracy is important, why we do not have that right at present and why we accept the case for there to be an appeal within the framework of the press commission. We should look at the kinds of cases that have occurred and see that behind them is the fundamental issue of inaccuracy. I was referring to the case of Mr. Russell Harty, when window cleaners were bribed to allow photographs to be taken of a ward, attempts were made to steal doctors' records, there were impersonations of doctors and nurses and there was a hounding of suffering relatives and friends. Conservative Members are defending people who take such action. They are failing to set up a procedure, through the press commission, that would allow an appeal against such press behaviour.

Mr. Batiste: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman brings it on his own head, because he will not give way. The hon. Gentleman appears to be speaking to an entirely different Bill from the one that I have in front of me. I wonder whether there has

[Mr. Batiste]

been a procedural error and he has a different document. None of the circumstances he has mentioned is relevant to the Bill in front of us.

Mr. Flannery *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the House will leave matters of order to the Chair. The hon. Gentleman is now addressing himself to the new clause.

Mr. Flannery: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) has intervened repeatedly, as, indeed, have other Conservative Members. They are filibustering. They are trying to stop the democratic procedure in the Chamber by hounding my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who has introduced the Bill. That is entirely in line with the way in which Conservative Members are defending the people who own the press.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What has been said so far is in order. It is my job to ensure that the rules of order are observed. The hon. Gentleman has assured me that he is about to address his remarks more closely to the new clause.

Mr. Worthington: Once again, I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Certainly, I want to demonstrate why I think we should have, as the new clause proposes, a better appeals procedure. The Press Council, which is the present appeals procedure, is inadequate because its methods are extremely faulty. What I am proposing—aligned with the proposal of the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight)—would be infinitely better. At present, about 1,700 or 1,800 appeals against press misconduct go to the Press Council each year and of those about 4 or 5 per cent. are upheld. About 850 to 900 simply disappear each year, because people see that there is no point in taking their cases to a body that is so steered towards the needs of the press. A press commission would be a much fairer and more open system of appeal. I am happy to add to that proposal the further tier proposed by the hon. Member for Derby, North. When one considers the kind of bias that is implicit in the Press Council's judgments, it is clear that we must have a better system of appeal.

One Press Council judgment, which I cited to the Committee, illustrates the need for a better system of appeal. A school felt that it had been abused by a local newspaper and the head teacher refused to talk to the paper because her experience was that its reporters distorted what she said. The Press Council judgment, against which there is no appeal, stated:

"the Press Council deplores the practice of some schools, education authorities and local authorities in refusing to speak to particular newspapers or answer their inquiries. Organisations which do so have little ground for serious complaint if inaccuracies are published in good faith as a result of their absence."

In other words, if someone's experience is that a paper distorts what he has said and he therefore decides not to speak to that paper, any subsequent inaccuracies are his fault. That is an outrage. There is no appeal against such judgments and that is why we need a less biased approach.

Another example of the present lack of appeal procedures and the biased practices of the Press Council may amuse some hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) appealed to the Press Council about an article in the *Sunday Express*, which said:

"Three times in the previous 14 days Mr. Brown, Labour MP for Leith, telephoned the home of Chris Moncrieff, political editor of the Press Association. Each time he reversed the charges from Kabul in Afghanistan at £9·37 a time. Twice Mr. Moncrieff was out and his wife answered, but the third time Mr. Brown got through. He asked Mr. Moncrieff to tell the Labour Whips the weather was bad in Afghanistan and that he might not be back in time for Monday's vote on the Scottish Housing Bill. Mr. Moncrieff was as speechless as he must now be penniless."

My hon. Friend the Member for Leith legitimately appealed against that press story on the grounds that he had not reversed telephone charges three times from Kabul. The Press Council, however, found against him and upheld the report. It was only because my hon. Friend forced the Press Council to reconsider its decision and forced Mr. Moncrieff to produce his telephone bill, which showed no report of any reversed charges from Kabul, that his appeal was upheld. Currently, there is no right of appeal on a Press Council decision, but somehow my hon. Friend got his case reopened. It is necessary to have a right of appeal in such cases.

Mr. Waller *rose*——

Mr. Worthington: I shall give way just to give myself a breather.

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman has quoted from the Press Council report. It is clear from that report that only 10 per cent. of complaints relate to matters of accuracy. The hon. Gentleman said that most cases have something to do with inaccuracy, but that is not correct, because far more cases refer to matters of taste and decency.

Mr. Worthington: For the past few months I have gone through the annual reports of the Press Council. I have only been able to look at a limited number of adjudications and in the majority of cases it is clear that the press report has been built upon inaccuracy. From that basis issues of distortion, taste and privacy follow.

If I had introduced a Bill that gave a right of reply on reports relating to distortion, taste and so on as well as inaccuracy, Conservative Members would have said that it was unworkable. I believe that things have reached such a state in the press that it is necessary to demand that the press be accurate—that is a minimal demand. If the press is not accurate, there should be a statutory right of reply, because, at present, the press has gone too far.

Because of the present inadequate system it is necessary to establish a press commission and an appeals procedure. The Government have asked us to trust the Press Council to reform itself. The very people who have stood by while press standards have plummeted are now to be entrusted with the job of pulling the press up by its boot straps. I have immense respect for Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper, but even he is rather daunted by the messianic powers that are now being attributed to him.

It is regrettable that the representatives of the press proprietors have not given the type of undertakings that would make it possible to withdraw the Bill. What have we heard from News International? There is an interesting

leader in *The Daily Telegraph* of this morning which says that standards of modern journalism rest overwhelmingly in one or two people's hands:

"Mr. Murdoch and Mr. Maxwell, who own most—though not quite all—of the newspapers which give rise to most offence, could change the scene tomorrow, if they chose. The power lies with them."

Mr. P. Rack is the representative of *News of the World* and News International on the Press Council, but what has he said about what that group will do in future to ensure the achievement of higher standards? He has said absolutely nothing. There is no credibility in the belief that the Press Council will be able to reform itself, because we have had no such undertakings from our major newspapers. The most cynical thing that has happened recently has been the appointment of an ombudsman by *The Sun*—he is its managing editor. Some of my hon. Friends may think that that is a joke, but it is no joke because that man represented *The Sun* when the Press Council investigated the infamous Ealing rape case story.

Mr. John Browne *rose*——

Mr. Worthington: No, I will not give way.

What happened with the Ealing rape case demonstrates why it is necessary to have a better appeals procedure. The Press Council said:

"four days after the attack, this front view full length, photograph occupied three full columns on the front page. It showed her leaving church after a service the previous day. On the photograph her features had been obscured by a black line or label masking the eyes. The story with it began by identifying but not naming her and went on
'raped in her home prayed yesterday'
Its second paragraph described her as a pretty, dark-haired girl, identified the vicar's church precisely, and defined their relationship."

Mr. Greg Knight: It was accurate, then.

Mr. Worthington: I will come to that point in a moment.

11.30 am

The managing editor of *The Sun* said

"that the paper did not consider use of the picture tasteless and would not have published had it had thought so. Rape was a sordid and callous crime which *The Sun* believed it was its duty to present in a way that illustrated contempt for 'these savages'. The letter said that the picture was published to show the victim's 'ordinary, girl-next-door qualities'. It was never their intention to upset, annoy or cause offences to the victim or their readers, and if they had they were sorry."

That is what was said by *The Sun's* ombudsman. What undertaking has been given by its representatives on the Press Council that it will abide by the findings of the Press Council in the future? The Press Council's code on privacy is broken daily and repeatedly, and a reformed Press Council would be acting on that. Intrusions into privacy occur every day in the press. There must be a better system than the Press Council, which cannot deliver: there must be an appeal procedure.

The Government's silence on the issue has been disturbing. As a result, abuses of people in the press have been allowed. A fortnight ago a leaked report appeared in two newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Independent:*

"Minister backs press law review".

The Minister, to his credit, admits that the tabloid journals have reached a very low level. But two weeks ago he was considering a comprehensive review of press law, including such issues as right of reply, confidentiality, defamation, the abuse of press power and other matters that currently concern us. It was wrong of him to leak that to the press, and I hope that he will now make a statement about the Government's present proposals.

Mr. Renton: The silence of the Government is about to be broken yet again.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) on the eloquent way in which he spoke to new clause 4. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), for Slough (Mr. Watts), for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) and for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) for their useful interventions, which, I think, helped my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North to elaborate on a number of points. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) did not include the idea of an appeals tribunal in the first draft of his Bill, but we have had a useful discussion about it this morning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North talked about "misunderstood Ministers". I should confess that I have a personal interest in ensuring that the Bill, however flawed I may think it, passes into law. I was promoted from Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to Minister of State some four years ago. The next day I picked up *The Times* expecting to read a glowing description of this meteoric rise in my career, the Prime Minister's perceptiveness in promoting me, and so forth. The larger part of the article about my promotion, however, concentrated on the fact that I had once portrayed Great-Uncle Bulgaria in "The Wombles of Wimbledon Common".

Unfortunately, *The Times* had got the wrong Tim Renton. I was never Great-Uncle Bulgaria in "The Wombles of Wimbledon Common". I therefore telephoned Julian Haviland, whom many of us remember as an extremely good, unbiased political editor of *The Times*, and told him what had happened, in tones of great indignation. He was extremely apologetic and assured me that the matter would be put right. Sure enough, the next day, tucked away at the bottom of page 23 or 27, was a tiny passage of three lines, saying something like "The report of Mr. Renton's career in the pop industry was inaccurate."

Under the Bill, I would have had an obvious claim to take to the press commission. I decided, in fact, that what the paper had said was not damaging to my career; indeed, I thought that it probably enhanced my prospects. There was, however, a sidelight. Among my new responsibilities at the Foreign Office was the post of Minister with duties relating to Hong Kong.

Those in Hong Kong always regard the Minister involved simply as "their man": he is the Hong Kong Minister. Some weeks later I discovered that papers such as the *South China Morning Post* had run headlines stating "New Hong Kong Minister ex-pop star". Perhaps they went even further and stated "Ex-Great-Uncle Bulgaria new Hong Kong Minister"—which must have puzzled the Chinese a good deal.

Moreover—here is the rub—the Hong Kong papers never noticed the tiny correction in *The Times*. Throughout the two years for which I had responsibility for Hong Kong, it was assumed that I was, indeed, an ex-Great-Uncle Bulgaria. That may have caused some of the difficulties in the subsequent relations between the United Kingdom Government and Hong Kong: I do not know. Clearly, however, I had a good case for the press commission, and one that could go to the appeals tribunal

[Mr. Renton]

suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North—and what a lovely can of worms that would have opened.

My hon. Friend argued his case very well. As has been pointed out, one of my other responsibilities at the Home Office is immigration and nationality. In that context, there is an extensive system of appeals, run not by the Home Secretary but by the Lord Chancellor. Decisions made by the immigration authorities can, as we know, have a profound effect on individuals and their families, and for that reason it was considered appropriate to introduce and continue an appeals framework.

It could be argued that decisions made following a complaint to the Press Council also have a profound effect on the lives of individuals, families and organisations. I can well understand that, given the potential importance of the council's decisions, an appeals machinery to review such decisions would be appropriate.

Let me give an example from immigration records to illustrate why the appeals tribunal is so helpful. It is an instance of fact blurring into interpretations of an event by parties who are in disagreement. A Member of Parliament rings my office and complains that a young lady carrying certificates of hairdressing qualifications has been refused entry as a visitor at the airport. The immigration officer has decided, on the basis of the certificates, that she has come to this country not as a visitor but to work. The Member of Parliament has been told, however, that the certificates are simply being carried by a visiting relative to be proudly displayed to her hosts as proof of her qualifications in the country from which she has come. That is just the sort of case in which an immigration appeals tribunal that could have a further and second look at the executive decisions of immigration officers can be a valuable safeguard.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I see the hon. Member rising to his feet and I know that he wants to ask me a question about the immigration appeals tribunal. I would much rather get on and talk about the press, but I shall give way.

Mr. Cohen: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. The kind of appeals tribunal to which the Minister refers would be absolutely worthless. In the case to which he referred the girl would be deported. The Minister would not interfere with the immigration officer's decision. She could appeal only in the country from which she came. The procedure that the Minister wants to include in the Bill would be useless.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman's Pavlovian reaction to my remark was exactly the one that I had expected. The appeals tribunal's function is to review Home Office decisions. It is no longer the duty of Ministers to interfere with those decisions. That change has been widely welcomed by a large majority of hon. Members.

I do not intend to elaborate on the rules that might support the appeals tribunal. If my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North cares to write to me about it, should the matter progress further, we could then look carefully together at the rules.

I share the general approval, expressed in the Chamber and in Committee, of the good-humoured manner in which the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie has approached this difficult subject. His good humour seemed to be in danger of cracking for a few minutes this morning, but he quickly re-established his normal equilibrium. I wholly understand and sympathise with the concern that has been expressed about the excesses of the national press, particularly the tabloid press. There is worry about doorstepping, intrusion into people's private lives, persistent trick questioning, the taking of secret photographs and the harassment of ordinary people, especially at times of distress when they are least able to cope. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said that lots of people were sick about the way in which the press behave. I agree. However, despite the deliberations in Committee, the Bill is still fundamentally flawed.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie praised the new chairman of the Press Council, Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper. I remind him of the first paragraph of an article in *The Times* today that was written by Mr. Blom-Cooper. It says:

> "The nuts and bolts of the Right of Reply Bill have been widely demonstrated to be utterly impracticable . . . The proposed legislation is also fundamentally flawed, however, in seeking for the first time to regulate the content of a newspaper by law."

There is no point in the hon. Gentleman praying in aid the chairman of the Press Council as a supporter of the Bill. He is not. He regards the Bill as fundamentally flawed. Even the National Union of Journalists believes that it is flawed. *[Interruption.]* What a pity that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), who is a member of the National Union of Journalists and who was here earlier, has left the Chamber. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) should know that the NUJ has said that it is determined to regain membership of the Press Council as part and parcel of that more effective structure that Mr. Blom-Cooper is trying to organise. I should have thought that Opposition Members would welcome that development.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Renton: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish this point.

The NUJ considers that the Bill is flawed. It may believe in a statutory right of reply but it has made it abundantly plain that it does not consider that this Bill is the right vehicle for it.

Mr. Wilson: Many NUJ members, including me, do not wish to be protected if we pursue mendacity. All that the Bill does is to remove the right to make factual inaccuracies—in many cases very hurtful and damaging inaccuracies. That is not a press freedom which I or any other responsible journalist wishes to maintain.

Mr. Renton: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised that point. It leads me to exactly the next point that I want to make.

The Bill would certainly allow a correction to be enforced legally where necessary. However, let us examine the point more closely. The Bill's title is somewhat misleading. It does not create a right of reply. Such a term implies a right for an individual to state his case or to respond to published material—factual or not, inaccurate or not—in the same publication.

What, however, does the Bill offer? It creates a right to correct inaccurate statements of fact in published material,

provided that the complainant can establish first, that the material was factually inaccurate, secondly, that the factual inaccuracy affected him personally and, thirdly, that any reasonable person might deem that inaccuracy to be damaging to his character, reputation or good standing —in other words, that it is defamatory.

11.45 am

Even leaving aside the notorious difficulty of drawing a clear line between fact, comment and opinion and the further problem of proving that a statement of fact is inaccurate and defamatory, it seems to me that the Bill will eventually only allow a satisfactory reply to unfair reporting in a small number of cases.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Can the Minister explain the constantly recurring problem of what is and what is not fact, which we can all understand causes difficulty? He, as a Home Office Minister, is responsible for, among other things, all the Broadcasting Acts, which lay down specifically that responsibility must be taken for factual accuracy. That is spelt out in the programme guidelines throughout the broadcasting media. How is it possible for the Minister, who is responsible for regulations that make for better broadcasting standards, to say that they are inapplicable to the press?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman destroys his own case. There is much discussion and criticism now of broadcast documentaries that have acquired the name of "faction" because they are a mix of fact and fiction. Many people believe that that is a bad trend within many reportedly factual documentaries.

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I think that I should make progress. There will be plenty of opportunities to discuss broadcasting on other days.

I want to take up the point about the dividing line between fact, comment and opinion. If, for example, we become involved in a legal suit, we believe that the facts are all on our side. The other side believes that the facts are all on its side. There is no agreement about where the facts lie. As to the borderline between fact and opinion, if the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) went into a restaurant and said afterwards—and it was reported in the press—"The food was not fresh and the service was awful", would that be fact or opinion? [HON. MEMBERS: "Opinion."] Others would say that it was fact.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Renton: No. We went into this matter in great detail in Committee. There is a borderline between fact, comment and opinion.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie.

Mr. Worthington: The Broadcasting Act 1981 set up the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. The commission was given responsibility to stop unwarranted intrusions into privacy. However, that responsibility was not defined. If the Minister can give the Broadcasting Complaints Commission such a difficult concept to deal with, why would it not be possible for a press commission to deal with the much simpler issue of fact?

Mr. Renton: I am very well aware of the Broadcasting Complaints commission and its terms of reference. If the Bill sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) is considered by the House on Report, we shall have the opportunity to discuss privacy. Today we are discussing neither broadcasting nor privacy, but the inaccurate reporting of facts.

Mr. Tebbit: We have had a perfect example of the difficulties about facts this morning when the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) referred to Mr. Chris Moncrieff of the Press Association. Since then I have received a letter from Mr. Moncrieff, who is my constituent, saying that there was some difficulty over the facts because, most notably, the hon. Gentleman did not mention that the disputed telephone calls in the anecdote did not appear on Mr. Moncrieff's telephone bill because his wife did not accept the request for a reverse-charge call. Having read all the accounts of these matters, the hon. Gentleman should have been fair to a journalist.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is a precise example of misreporting when one part of the story is carefully left out in order to make a point. It is precisely the sort of nightmare that the Bill would produce.

Mr. Worthington *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I shall gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman as it is his Bill, but then I must make progress.

Mr. Worthington: How is it possible for the allegation to be made that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) reversed the charges from Kabul in Afghanistan at £9·37 a time? How would one know the amount of money?

Mr. Renton: I do not think that I am responsible for the activities of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown). In my days at the Foreign Office, when the hon. Member for Leith moved on from his regular questions about Afghanistan to a question about Albania, I remember congratulating him on making progress down the alphabet, but I do not think that I have any responsibility for his bills. The hon. Gentleman may wish to raise the matter on an Adjournment debate, as clearly it is a matter worth pursuing.

We have briefly discussed the press commission. I consider that it would be another quango with no fewer than 21 members on it. What a nightmare of bureaucracy is in prospect with all 21 members having to see all the papers and all the complaints and doubtless having to agree unanimously on the outcome of each complaint within 28 days of receiving the complaint. And what at the end of the day about the Press Council? Will it fade into the distance and beyond? We have heard a great deal of criticism of the Press Council.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), who was a member of the Standing Committee, must let me develop the point a little further.

[Mr. Renton]

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House would welcome the disappearance of the Press Council, but they forget that it has other important functions such as to preserve the established freedom of the press and to make representations to the Government on appropriate occasions. How will the press commission interact with the Press Council? I asked the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie that question in Committee, but I never received an understandable reply. Confusion is bound to occur in the relationship between the Press Council and the press commission.

Mr. Ashton: The Minister reads his brief and confuses question and comment. Will he make it perfectly clear whether he is speaking for himself or for the Government?

Mr. Renton: I am pleased to say that the Government and I are as one on this issue—and that is most satisfactory. As I have said before—and the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) heard me speak about this in Committee and will not be surprised by anything I say—my deepest objection to the principle of the Bill is that it intrudes on the freedom of the press. It introduces a measure of Government control over the press, and who can say what would follow, once one statutory measure had been introduced? We have not had statutory control of the press in Britain since the days of Cromwell in the 17th century.

Mr. John Browne: My hon. Friend has said that if the Bill were passed it would intrude on the rights of the press. He is really saying that it would intrude on the rights of the press to bully individual people and that is the whole question. He places reliance on the Press Council, whose members are very hard-working people, but they have no teeth, and of course they lack credibility. He talks about ombudsmen, but they are seen not as ombudsmen but as "ombudsmice". What the House and the Bill are trying to do is to protect the individual person with ombudsmen—something with teeth.

Mr. Renton: I heard the phrase "not ombudsmen but ombudsmice" for the first time two days ago in the Committee considering my hon. Friend's Bill. It is a nice turn of phrase, but he does less than justice to the new chairman of the Press Council, Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper, who is clearly determined to prove its effectiveness and continues to believe, as I do, in the system of self-regulation of the press. I am very pleased to note the warning given by Mr. Blom-Cooper in his foreword to the recent report of the Press Council:

> "Much more should and will be expected from all those in and out of the Press Council who have an abiding interest in ensuring that an independent, self-regulatory body should succeed in averting statutory intervention."

That is at the heart of the matter. Evidence of the new intent and purpose of the Press Council is clear from its speedy announcement this week to investigate the propriety of the photographic coverage of the Hillsborough disaster, which has been mentioned this morning. We should all approve of the Press Council acting so quickly to examine the propriety of publishing those photographs.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): How will the Minister's announced review of press law address the question raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the abuses of factual inaccuracies in the press? Does he intend that his review will cover that, and how will it address that point?

Mr. Renton: Despite all his persuasive skills, the hon. Gentleman must allow me to make my own speech in my own way and in the order that I choose.

It is my very strong view that, despite the lack of action and the feeling of apathy in the Press Council in recent years, we should not undermine its determination to bring about fundamental change.

Mr. John Browne *rose*——

Mr. Renton: With all respect to my hon. Friend, I have give way generously and others wish to speak.

Nor do I think we should lightly jettison the commitment and good will which all sections of the press are showing to the Press Council.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie on what he has achieved, not only in bringing his Bill to Report today, but because his Right of Reply Bill has woken up newspaper proprietors, publishers and editors to extent of concern that they have not shown for years. The heavies have thundered against him from Wapping, the Isle of Dogs, Southwark bridge and Chelsea bridge. They have all been telling us about the inadequacies of his Bill. The local newspapers have written to us in the same vein. I have received two letters from two newspapers printed in my constituency pointing out the errors of the Bill and very politely asking me to try and be present in the House today. I received the same message from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie has even had the honour of a long and wordy article written by Bernard Levin in *The Times*. That article is as prolix, complex and emotional as any criticism by Mr. Levin of a bad performance of the Ring Cycle.

Editors and publishers are steamed up. They have been made thoroughly aware of the proper, correct and understandable anxieties of many hon. Members.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Will the Minister give way?

12 noon

Mr. Renton: I did not give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester, so I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The editors and publishers are, to put it crudely, in a lather and the pressure must not go away. As Members of Parliament we must ensure that editors and journalists, such as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—it is good that he has left Sky television to join us today——

Mr. Mitchell: Will the Minister give way now?

Mr. Renton: Since I named the hon. Gentleman, I shall give way.

Mr. Mitchell: The Minister said that there were monstrous abuses by the press and that the Bill was flawed. In those circumstances, the honest and honourable course would be not to praise the Bill with faint damns and postpone everything unto the ides of Blom-Cooper and certainly not to go along with the monstrous conspiracy of the lackeys and lickspittles of the Fleet street magnates on

the Conservative Benches and filibuster against the Bill, but to provide Government time either to improve the Bill or introduce his own measure.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman has now achieved his 30 seconds on television tonight. Why is it that one is a lackey and a lickspittle if one writes for *The Times* but not if one appears on Sky television, which is also part of the Murdoch empire? Perhaps he can tell us where the precise line of definition lies.—*[Interruption.]* I have appeared on Sky television with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and it was great fun. I recommend it to the House.

If, by any chance, the Bill does not receive its Third Reading, the editors and publishers of the national press in Britain are on probation—*[Laughter.]* They have a year or two in which to clean up their act. If they succeed—I hope that they will—effective, quick and fair self-regulation that protects the position and rights of the private individual and the small man who cannot look after himself very well will remain the order of the day. That will happen without statutory control of the press. If not, Parliament will certainly return to this issue. For that reason and on raising the temperature of the debate I congratulate the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie and my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester.

There is a better way out of the difficulties that would be created by the Bill and by the Protection of Privacy Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester. Those difficulties have dominated our debate so far today and they dominated our proceedings in Committee. Therefore, it is right that I should let the House know that the Government have decided that there should be a review of the general issue of privacy and related matters —areas with which both Bills are concerned. The review will be conducted outside Government and will aim to report to the Home Secretary within a year.

Mr. Ashton: Who will carry out the review?

Mr. Renton: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked me that question from a sedentary position.

Decisions have still to be taken on who should be invited to chair the review and the precise terms of reference. A formal announcement will be made in due course. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester will regard that as a positive step.

Mr. John Browne *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I will not give way to my hon. Friend.

The review is designed to deal with the problems that have correctly and understandably concerned hon. Members on both sides of the House and I trust that it will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): People outside the House will be surprised and depressed by the fact that the new clause, which we have been debating for two and half hours, was accepted by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) at the beginning of the debate. They will find it surprising that the Minister, by speaking for over half an hour, has indirectly associated himself and the Government with the filibuster that has prevented the serious points that have been raised both inside and outside the House from being raised. When the Minister said that he hoped the Bill receive a Third Reading——

Mr. Renton: I did not say that.

Mr. Fisher: He said that he hoped that we would proceed to a Third Reading. His behaviour this morning makes that difficult.

Once again we have seen a confused stance by the Government. They did not vote against the Bill on Second Reading and they did not seek to vote against any of the amendments in Committee. They have remained passive. Yet we understand from the press that over the past few weeks, by whispering and making unofficial leaks to the press, the Government have made it clear that they are now opposed to the Bill. They would have done themselves and the debate a greater service by playing a more active role in the Second Reading and Committee stages.

The Government and hon. Members on both sides of the House know that over the past few years there has been a growing number of abuses, as identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. The Press Council's annual report for the past few years has revealed an increase in abuses by certain sectors of the press. Opposition Members accept that the regional press and the free press do not indulge in those tactics. We know that we are talking about only a small section of the press. However, the damage that can be done to people's lives, marriages, relationships and prospects is grave. If hon. Members who have sought to speak at great length this morning do not recognise the seriousness of that offence and the depth of feeling in the country, they are mistaking the mood of the House and the country.

Mr. Wilson: Does my hon. Friend agree that a test of press freedom in this country will be to see how many newspapers tomorrow list the small bunch of Tories who have done the dirty work today and filibustered during this debate?

Mr. Fisher: I agree with my hon. Friend. It will be surprising to see that list.

I am delighted that the Minister has now explained to the House, at least in principle, the review that he intends to put in train. In the absence of the Government's support for this legislation, that will be widely welcomed.

Mr. John Browne: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that, although the Government have announced a review, that is exactly what happened when the late Lord Mancroft introduced his privacy Bill and when Mr. Alex Lyon and Mr. Brian Walden did the same? The Younger committee reported in 1972 and since then the situation has got worse and worse. All we shall have is the eyewash of yet another review.

Mr. Fisher: Because of the way in which they have approached this issue and the issue raised by the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), the House will be looking closely at the Government when they deliver the review. It will want strong assurances about the terms of reference. I note that, when referring to the terms of reference of the review, the Minister mentioned privacy, which is of great interest to all people, but did not mention the right of reply. I hope that in setting the terms of the review he will specifically include that and other abuses and lay out clearly for the chairman exactly what the Government expect. I hope that the Minister will ensure that the membership of the review is wide-ranging and includes independent people who represent the views of the general public.

[Mr. Fisher]

The Government's record on appointing bodies such as this is deplorable. Too often, Government appointments to such review bodies are extremely partial. I hope that on this occasion the Minister will ensure that a wide range of views is included in order to give it the credibility that the public require and that is necessary in view of the debate we have had over the past few weeks.

History will be on the side of the Bill, and we shall return to it next year. This is the fourth or fifth time this decade that an hon. Member has tried to introduce such legislation. We have moved further, thanks to the excellent work and advocacy of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. We have at last persuaded Ministers and hon. Members that this issue cannot and will not go away. The Government must recognise that and understand the seriousness of the problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie has done an excellent job over the past few weeks. He has shown clearly the seriousness of the abuses that have occurred. His anxieties have been echoed around the country. It is up to the Government, if they cannot support the Bill, to get on with the review, give a time limit for it, undertake that they will introduce legislation at the end of it and bring their recommendations before the House. The public will expect nothing less of the Government, and it is up to them to fulfil those expectations.

Mr. Rooker: In the interests of the little people against the lie sheets, I beg to move, That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 100, Noes 26.

Division No. 169] **[12.10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Aitken, Jonathan
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchan, Norman
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Ground, Patrick
Hardy, Peter
Holland, Stuart
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Irving, Charles
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Leighton, Ron
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Renton, Tim
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shersby, Michael
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody
and Mr. George J. Buckley.

NOES

Ashton, Joe
Batiste, Spencer
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Forth, Eric
Gow, Ian
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Lightbown, David
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stevens, Lewis
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, John
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Knight and
Mr. John Watts.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Batiste: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must proceed to put the Question.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House proceeded to a Division:—

Mr. Watts *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the Division, within the total of 100 in favour of the closure, one hon. Member was included who voted in both the Aye and the No Lobbies. In those circumstances, has the necessary total of 100 votes been cast in favour of the closure?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That does not affect the numbers. It is always possible for an hon. Member to cancel his vote by going in to the other Lobby.

Mr. Tebbit *(seated and covered):* Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall take the point of order when I have appointed the Tellers.

Mr. Tebbit *(seated and covered):* Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You said correctly that an hon. Member may have voted in both Lobbies to cancel one vote. Have you ascertained whether he wished to cancel the vote that made the total up to 100 for the closure, or the other vote? If the former, surely the closure cannot be passed by the vote of an hon. Member opposed to it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Division was carried out correctly. I have made inquiries, and I am satisfied of that.

Mr. Roger King *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the point of order related to the Division? If not, I shall take it afterwards.

Mr. King *(seated and covered):* It is a point of order concerning the Division, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am in some difficulty in deciding how to vote because I have only heard speeches in favour of the new clause. I have heard nothing——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not question the judgment of the Chair in accepting the closure.

The House having divided: Ayes 96, Noes 23.

Division No. 170] **[12.24 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchan, Norman
Budgen, Nicholas
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Ground, Patrick
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Irving, Charles
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lightbown, David
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shersby, Michael
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Vaz, Keith
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wall, Pat
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody
and Mr. George J. Buckley.

NOES

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Doran, Frank
Forth, Eric
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gow, Ian
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Janman, Tim
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Lawrence, Ivan
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Short, Clare
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Spencer Batiste and
Mr. Lewis Stevens.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 5

COMMENCEMENT

'This Act shall come into force on such date as the Lord Chancellor shall by statutory instrument provide.'—*[Mr. Gow.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Gow: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 77, in clause 2, page 2, line 2, after 'appointed', insert—

'(a) on the establishment of the Commission'.

No. 96, in page 2, line 2, leave out 'Secretary of State' and insert 'Lord Chancellor'.

No. 76, in page 2, line 2, after 'State', insert—

', and (b) in subsequent years by the Secretary of State and the Commission in equal numbers.'.

No. 84, in the schedule, page 4, line 17, leave out 'by the Secretary of State'.

No. 88, in page 4, line 23, leave out 'by the Secretary of State'.

Mr. Gow: Tomorrow we shall celebrate the anniversary of the birth of his late Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Hon. Members may wonder about the relevance of that anniversary to the debate. It is a question which has occurred to my hon. Friend the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household, who is characteristically seated in his place. We noted that anniversary on an earlier occasion. Is it a matter of fact or a matter of opinion? The Bill is concerned with fact or opinion.

The new clause mentions the Lord Chancellor. It has been tabled for two reasons: first, to show my right hon. and hon. Friends' confidence in the Lord Chancellor—a confidence which, apparently, is not shared by all of Her Majesty's judges—and, secondly, to bring sense to the Bill. It is difficult to bring sense to the Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister, as diligent as ever in the performance of his duties, is still present. *[Interruption.]* The Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household laughs. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) laughed. He has now ceased to laugh. He recognises the truth of that remark.

As I said, we need to bring some sense to the Bill. It is difficult to bring sense to the Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister read out to the House an article by Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper who, as the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household knows, is one of Her Majesty's counsel. He has been appointed chairman of the Press Council. No better appointment to that important office has ever been made. I praise Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper. He is a lawyer of outstanding quality, and he has a sense of honour. I was surprised when some Opposition Members gave the impression that they had no confidence in Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper. *[Interruption.]* That was the impression.

Mr. Fisher: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gow: A Wykehamist always gives way to an Etonian.

Mr. Fisher: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, wherever he was educated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has had to leave the Chamber. I make it clear on his behalf that, far from casting any aspersions on Mr. Blom-Cooper, my hon. Friend has gone out of his way, on Second Reading, in Committee and today, to pay tribute to him and to the reform of the Press Council that he is seeking. The fact that my hon. Friend considers that that work is likely to be doomed, because the Press Council is organised by those who control and own the press, is another matter. My hon. Friend's personal opinions of Mr. Blom-Cooper are clearly on record. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that and accept that no Opposition Member has cast any aspersions on Mr. Blom-Cooper.

Mr. Gow: I made the fairly innocent and, I thought, accurate remark that my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. and hon. Friends gained the impression that Opposition Members—other than the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie—do not think very highly of Mr. Blom-Cooper. My right hon. and hon. Friends are not shaking their heads and saying, "You have gone off your head, Gow." Instead of shaking their heads, they are nodding. The heads that are nodding do not belong to me but are those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. They are of age, and they can give their own indications.

I see on the Treasury Bench three Ministers—as will the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) if he looks straight ahead. Whips are certainly Ministers—that is beyond dispute. Each of those three Ministers, chosen by the Prime Minister herself, agrees that the impression given by Opposition Members was that they do not have confidence in Mr. Blom-Cooper. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central is entitled to say that the wrong impression was given, but it is characteristic of the Labour party to give the wrong impression. It is always doing that.

Mr. Fisher: Without labouring the point, that matter will be resolved by reading the *Official Report*. Nothing on the record will show that my right hon. or hon. Friends gave such an impression. It might be that Conservative Members misinterpreted sedentary remarks, which can easily cause confusion. However, I suspect that nothing in the record of today's debate will bear out the impression gained by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). I am sure that he accepts that.

Mr. Gow: Certainly I agree with the hon. Gentleman. He is being so agreeable that I have even referred to him as "my hon. Friend." However, during the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister—and it was an excellent speech—he referred to the chairman of the Press Council. He was not ruled out by your immediate predecessor in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, because he was not out of order. When my hon. Friend the Minister made that remark, it was greeted with derisory laughter from the Opposition Benches. I am not inventing that incident. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) agrees. It is not only lay right hon. and hon. Friends who concur with my account. Not one of my right hon. or hon. Friends quarrels with what I say. That does not happen very often, but it has happened this morning.

Mr. Watts: Does my hon. Friend agree that the exchanges between him and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) illustrate one of the essential difficulties in the Bill? Even a matter so simple and matter of fact as what was said earlier in the Chamber can give rise to great controversy. Equally intelligent right hon. and hon. Members, listening to the same words, and seeing the same facial expressions, can arrive at wholly different conclusions as to the intentions behind words that were spoken.

Mr. Gow: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who in former times was my Parliamentary Private Secretary. If I may so, he was excellent—and I hope very much that he will catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, because he has an important contribution to make to our proceedings.

I do not want to devote my speech only to the subject of Mr. Blom-Cooper, but I place on record that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have great confidence in his ability, intelligence and sense of honour. I set out to put some sense into the Bill, but that is not easy.

I welcome the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to our proceedings. Earlier, before you were in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Gentleman was seated not where he is now, below the Gangway, but on the Opposition Front Bench. I hope that he will return there, because that is where he belongs.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I notice, however, that we have amendments before us and that the hon. Gentleman has had more than five minutes on his preamble. I should be grateful if he would relate his remarks to the amendments.

Mr. Gow: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I feel that I belong to the Front Bench through instinct and merit, but, unfortunately, not through office held.

12.45 pm

Mr. Gow: It is a matter of deep regret to the whole House, but above all to him, that the hon. Gentleman is not seated on the Opposition Front Bench. Although the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) does not share the high regard which I have for the hon. Gentleman, I have good news for the hon. Gentleman. The right hon. Gentleman will not be leading the Labour party after the next election. Then will come the time for rapid preferment for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tony Banks: I cannot say that I necesarily wish such a scenario to come about or that I share the hon. Gentleman's predictions. If my promotion is as rapid as he suggests, I hope that my demotion is not as rapid as his was.

Mr. Gow: As a matter of fact, I was not dismissed. I may have departed before I was dismissed, but I was not dismissed. That is a reasonable point to make.

New clause 5, which has been studied so carefully by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, will put some sense into the Bill.

Mr. Greg Knight: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gow: I am trying to make progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) is now in his place, so I want to proceed.

New clause 5 provides that the Bill shall not become operative until a date selected by the Lord Chancellor. Why? My hon. Friend the Minister read out part of an excellent article by Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper. We cannot have the Bill becoming operational before we have set up the press commission. Does my hon. Friend understand that point? The Bill cannot become law until we have appointed 21 members of the press commission. I am sure that he agrees.

I want the Lord Chancellor to decide by statutory instrument when the date shall be. That is perfectly common procedure. It is commonplace for an Act of Parliament to include a date on which that Act shall take effect. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West agrees. We have no such clause in the Bill. That is why I have tabled new clause 5, which is supported by some of my hon. Friends.

Mr. Renton: I am following my hon. Friend's argument with rapt attention. I am hoping that he will explain why the Lord Chancellor, rather than my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, should give his seal of approval to the time when the Bill shall come into force. After all, the Home Secretary would appoint the members of the commission. Earlier this week he was quoted as saying that that would be a heavy task to which he was not greatly looking forward. I may not have quoted him exactly, but that was the message of his remarks. I am not wholly clear yet why the Lord Chancellor, rather than the Home Secretary, should trigger off the Act, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will soon enlighten me.

Mr. Gow: For the very reason to which I referred in an intervention before 10 o'clock this morning. The words "The Secretary of State" in a Bill do not mean only the Home Secretary; they mean any Secretary of State.

The point that I want to make in response to the Minister's intervention is that I have much greater confidence in my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor than I have in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. The Secretary of State for Wales has strange views about economic and monetary policy. He is one of those people who still do not understand what most of us already understand about economic and monetary policy. Even the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) understood. He was the first Socialist monetarist.

The right hon. Member should take my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales for a long walk over the hills, and explain to him that, when the rate of growth of the supply of money and the rate of growth of the supply of goods and services get out of balance, the consequence is inflation. That is why we do not want the Secretary of State for Wales making the appointments. If one is unsound on an issue such as monetary policy, one's judgment can be affected dramatically in other ways.

Mr. Batiste: Can my hon. Friend help those of us who were concerned about the way in which the Bill appeared to be creating some Orwellian nightmare of a Ministry of Justice? Leaving aside the personalities in the various offices, but, looking purely at the comparison between, for example, the posts of Home Secretary and Lord Chancellor and drawing upon my hon. Friend's unrivalled experience in the House and of the people who have held those offices in the past, does my hon. Friend believe that it is inherent in the various responsibilities of those two offices that the Lord Chancellor would be the better person to deal with those difficult issues?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend has made an important point. It was not only the views of the Secretary of State for Wales that made me put down the new clause. Why I seek massive support for the new clause is that my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is under assault from the judges. When my noble Friend is under assault, we in this place can put down a marker to show our confidence in him. We have to appoint 21 members of the press commission, which is far too many and one of my amendments seeks to bring it down to five. My noble Friend deserves the confidence of the House in deciding when the Bill shall become operative. We want to show some of the judges, who have been criticising my noble Friend's proposals, that we back him. In the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), we are giving him another job. My hon. Friend is well versed in all matters related to journalism. Indeed, he is a distinguished writer himself. I wish that he would write more frequently in the newspapers and speak more frequently in this place.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): I am longing to.

Mr. Gow: I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

One cannot allow the Bill to become operative on the day that it reaches the statute book, because those 21 folk must be in place. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South would be a very good member of the press commission, but I am not volunteering him for that post. Certainly, we do not want the Secretary of State for Wales to be involved, because he is unsound on monetary policy.

Mr. Roger King: What about my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)?

Mr. Gow: No, I shall not mention him any more.

The third and most important reason is that we want to show our confidence and trust in my noble Friend. I believe that it is a very uncontroversial new clause. It will be widely welcomed. I am sure that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, who sits alone on the Opposition Front Bench, will welcome it warmly, but we shall receive no welcome from any representative of the Liberal party. We have noted that there has been an absence of any representative on the Liberal Benches even though the Liberal party is constantly proclaiming its concern about the press. It is a characteristic disgrace that there is no representative of the Liberal party here.

Mr. Wareing: I want to strike a serious note in relation to this subject.

Amendment No. 96 is of particular interest to me. When my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) introduced the Bill, it was with the serious intention of ensuring that the press commission, which he proposes to take the place of the inane, anachronistic and toothless tiger, the Press Council, should be accountable to the House of Commons.

If there is to be accountability to the elected House of this Parliament, there must be a Minister—in this case the Home Secretary—who should be responsible for

[Mr. Wareing]

answering questions or listening to complaints and problems which hon. Members, elected by their constituents, raise on the Floor of the House.

If the press commission had been in place during the past week, I and other colleagues on the Labour Benches and, possibly on the Government Benches, would have been raising some of the matters that we have unfortunately had to see in the pornographic sections of the British press. I would have been able to say to the Home Secretary—I could not say it to the Lord Chancellor—that he should look at the creatures who were able, on Wednesday, to publish their filth on the front page of *The Sun*. Incidentally, that is the same newspaper which got one of its journalists to ring me up a couple of months ago when a Conservative Member suffered the misfortune of his wife's death. That journalist telephoned me on a Sunday and pried into the private life of that hon. Gentleman. I told that journalist to get off, get himself another job—this time a job with dignity. Nobody with any dignity would work for *The Sun*.

In my home town of Liverpool there is now a massive boycott of that newspaper, a boycott which I wholeheartedly support. I hope that people up and down the country who have read the filth in Rupert Murdoch's paper will in future say no to buying any newspapers from that stable, including *The Times*.

No one in this country should be permitted to own more than one newspaper. If the Minister and other Conservative Members believe what they say about competition, there should be competition in the press. It should be possible for other proprietors to publish newspapers so that a wide stratum of opinion is expressed in our national press.

When the Minister reviews the situation—he says that he intends to do so—it is important to take on board the feeling on the Labour Benches that the Home Secretary is the right Minister to be responsible for answering to the House.

I hope—I suppose it is a forlorn one—that my hon. Friend's Bill will become law during this Session. I have no doubt that the Bill will become law in the due process of time, because we shall return to this subject time and time again. I hope he will understand, however, that we must have a Minister in the House of Commons responsible for answering for any press commission—or, if my hon. Friend is unfortunate, for the Press Council.

The Press Council, as I have said, is a toothless tiger which came into existence in the 1940s. The Royal Commission on the press stated in 1948 that the regular diet of the British public on a Sunday was crime, sex and violence; that has not changed after 40 years of the Press Council. Now we need a body with real teeth to take up the complaints that we bring to the House—even, perhaps, complaints about hon. Members who give quotes to the national press rather than raising points in the House.

1 pm

On Monday the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) was called by Mr. Speaker to question the Home Secretary following his statement about the Hillsborough disaster. I have not seen the hon. Gentleman here since. If he had been here, it might have been possible to persuade him to raise in the House points that we could then have contested.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are dealing with a new clause that is fairly specific. I should be obliged if he would direct his comments towards it.

Mr. Wareing: I am trying to make the point, Madam Deputy Speaker, that amendment No. 96 attempts to transfer accountability from this House to the other place. The Lord Chancellor may have highly desirable qualities as a judge: he may be able, very rationally and properly, to make appointments to certain bodies—for example, the Council of Tribunals. The Home Secretary, however, is the right Minister to refer to the press commission matters raised by constituents.

Constituents have taken the trouble—and have used their money—to telephone me in London, 200 miles from the constituency, to complain about what has been said in *The Sun*. Many people believe that the press is not sensitive enough in other respects. I heard the Minister mention on the radio this morning the recent case involving the Princess Royal's letters, and I have referred to the hon. Member who was bereaved in the recent past.

Surely to God there is a need for the Bill. Surely to God there is a need for a press commission—for something more than we have had over the past 40 years, which has not altered the press one little bit. Surely it is right for the Home Secretary to be able to exercise some control, on behalf of this democratic body, over the national press. We hear talk about freedom of the press, but there is no free press in this country. There are fewer newspapers and fewer newspaper proprietors than there were in 1948.

We should be able to question the Home Secretary. We do not wish to listen to Rupert Murdoch's vicars on earth on the Conservative Benches; we want our constituents' complaints to be dealt with. Who is in a position to redress the foul material that we have seen in *The Sun* this week, or even to register a complaint against the large photograph displayed on the front page of the *Daily Mirror*? To whom should we complain in the light of the last 40 years of Press Council inactivity, unwillingness or inability to deal with what happened throughout that period? It has to be the Home Secretary.

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): My hon. Friend asks who should be responsible for dealing with press outrages. He referred, rightly, to the absolute horror of the people of Liverpool over the headlines in *The Sun* and *The Star* and the abominable, frightening and terrifying photographs of the disaster. At the time of the Valley Parade football ground disaster in my constituency, there were press allegations that the fire had been started deliberately by incendiarists. They caused enormous anguish to many people in Bradford who were already devastated by the injuries and the loss of life. Nothing was done about that, despite the fact that the Popplewell inquiry found that those allegations were completely erroneous and untrue. As the representative of a constituency that suffered from such a disaster, I can only sympathise with my hon. Friend and the people of Liverpool who have had to put up with not only the Hillsborough disaster but the filth and calumny that has been heaped upon them by the dregs of the press.

Mr. Wareing: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has said. I hope that it registers with Ministers. That would be in the interests of the families of the 95 people of Liverpool who died and of all those who suffered as a result of the fire

at the Valley Parade football ground in Bradford. They are far and away more important than millionaire tycoons, some from overseas, who are allowed to get away with all this filth without any real action being taken against them by a Minister of the Crown.

When the Right of Reply Bill ultimately reaches the statute book it is important that the Minister with responsibility for these matters should be able to refer them to a press commission that has real teeth and that can dispossess these people—or creatures; that is how they are looked on by my constituents in Liverpool. That is why we oppose the new clause. All that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) seeks to ensure is that the problem is moved further and further away from the democratic representatives of constituents and that it is dealt with by the other place. We must ensure that the Home Secretary is able to deal with these creatures of the press. I hope that we shall create a press commission that has the power to impose real penalties on wrongdoers who are doing more damage to the press than any damage of which pornographers could be accused.

Mr. Greg Knight: I wish to speak briefly about my amendments which are grouped with new clause 5—Amendments Nos. 76, 77, 84 and 88. I invite the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) to say at the end of my speech that he is prepared to accept the amendments. Their purpose is to alter the appointments procedure. According to the Bill, the Secretary of State would appoint all the Members of the press commission for the first year. The amendments provide that in subsequent years only half the members would be appointed by the Secretary of State and that the other half would be appointed by the press commission.

I urge the promoter of the Bill to accept the amendments because, under the Bill as drafted, the Secretary of State would have complete control over the press commission because it would allow him to appoint all its members. That raises important questions about the independence of the press commission and the issue of Government control. Some fear that a future Government might use the press commission as a Government agent to exercise a form of censorship. I was shocked that yesterday the *Evening Standard* expressed that very fear. Its editorial column headed, "Rights and wrongs" stated:

> "By giving the most secretive Government in the Western world statutory control of the Press, it would inhibit our fundamental purpose to investigate and write about matters of real public interest . . . Nor is there anything to protect the newspaper from frivolous demands for reply, each of which would have to go before the Government-appointed press commission for settlement within 28 days."

There are already fears that the press commission would act as an arm of Government.

I was absolutely amazed by the comments in the *Evening Standard* because I regard my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary as one of the most liberal Home Secretaries we have had, and I am sure that those fears are groundless. Nevertheless they have to be taken into account. To give the press and the public confidence in the press commission's independence, clearly the Government should relinquish some of their control over it. The easiest solution would be for the Secretary of State initially to appoint all the members of the press commission, but subsequently it would be reasonable and sensible for the press commission to appoint a proportion of its members —my amendment has suggested half—so that accusations such as that in the *Evening Standard* cannot fairly and reasonably be made.

Mr. Batiste: It will be clear from some of my interventions in the debate that I am unhappy with the drafting of the Bill. I abstained on Second Reading because I hoped that the Bill would emerge from Committee in a form that I would find acceptable. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) is in his place as it is important that he understands why some of us have opposed his Bill today, but would not necessarily oppose a future Bill on similar lines were it drafted and structured differently.

I fully appreciate the disappointment that the hon. Gentleman must feel, having been successful in the ballot and having chosen an important subject for his private Bill, to see it disappear into the sands of time on Report. Having read the Committee *Hansard,* I recognise the good nature in which the Bill has proceeded, and I should not like him to feel that I was aggrieved at the way in which he handled my earlier attempt to ask him questions. By the same token, I hope that he will pay serious attention to the points that I should like to make about new clause 4 and the amendments grouped with it.

I should disclose an interest in the sense that I am a lawyer and my law firm acts for a wide variety of clients, some of whom publish local newspapers, but not for the national or tabloid press. On occasions we have acted for those who are deeply aggrieved at what goes into the press, so I have been able to examine the issue from both sides. Perhaps my greatest interest, as a lawyer, is that the Bill as drafted would create so much extra work for lawyers in the courts that it would go a very long way towards replacing the loss of the conveyancing monopoly. In that sense perhaps I am speaking against my interests in saying that I should prefer a Bill that was less likely to come to the courts for judicial review and interpretation of so many of its clauses.

The core of my concern is the nature of the press commission. As the Bill is drafted, there is the potential for the commission to become, as I said earlier, some Orwellian nightmare of a Ministry of Justice, having in place all the apparatus of oppressive censorship, including a kangaroo court, palm tree justice and all the other things that I would find unacceptable in any other area of judicial activity in Britain.

1.15 pm

The amendments relate to a particular part of the Bill so I shall confine my comments to that. However, flowing from that is a wider range of issues which concern my hon. Friends and myself. We are genuinely appreciative of all the points that have been raised by hon. Members and by many of our constituents. They are fed up with the antics of some sections of the press and their incapacity to appreciate the resentment they have created by their behaviour. Nobody outside the House should think that those of us who have been trying to amend the Bill to a form that we would find acceptable are offering comfort to those sections of the press. Should a Bill appear next year, either from a private Member or the Government, our reactions would not necessarily be the same.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman said that his actions and those of his hon. Friends should not be interpreted in

[Mr. Fisher]

that way. Does he not understand that that is how the tabloid press will interpret them? The press will take comfort from his comments and will see that they are being enabled to go on in this thoroughly unacceptable manner because hon. Members have sought to block this constructive Bill.

Mr. Batiste: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, because I can do no more than put on record my interpretation and, if any other interpretation is drawn from my comments, it will be wrong.

I have had considerable experience of the way in which tribunals in different areas operate. I have to balance the wrongs done to some individuals, which are so far without remedy for all sorts of reasons that have been described during the debate, with what I would see as the hamstringing of the press. That is not just a convenient slogan for trying to stick up for newspaper barons. It is an appreciation of the fact that one of the important pillars of a democracy is a press which at times is willing to make itself unpopular with Governments and people in trying to expose the truth. The press may sometimes go over the line, but, in balancing those issues, it would be wrong for a Member of Parliament to support what seems to be easy and popular now while placing in hostage the future of something that is fundamental to our democracy.

I support some amendments in the group and not others. the switch from the Secretary of State to the Lord Chancellor in the appointment of members of the press commission appears in one of the amendments. It will be clear from what I have said that my main concern is caused by the nature of the press commission. Clause 2 states that the press commission shall

"comprise 21 members . . . appointed by the Secretary of State."

I looked for some further clarification as to the balance of the commission. I looked to paragraphs 5 and 6 of the schedule but I found that the only balance listed is in terms of race, gender and regional representation in society. Those are important matters, but when one is appointing a group of people who can have a profound effect on our society, many other factors should be taken into account.

For that reason, we must look at the nature of the appointment of those people. I should have preferred to see much more specification in the Bill. When quangos are created elsewhere, a careful balance between the competing interests is usually provided in the Bill. It is a grave omission that there is no such balance in this Bill. The attempt at balance listed in the Bill does not carry any serious significance having regard to the nature of the work to be carried out by the commission. It has no boundaries and can deal with matters as they arise, but, because of its voluntary nature, it does not need safeguards to prevent abuses of power. I appreciate hon. Members' points that the Press Council by no means fulfils that role, but I hope that the voluntary body created as a result of Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper's appointment and the changes that he is proposing will give the public and hon. Members greater confidence.

I accept, however, that there may have to be some form of statutory control, but, rather than creating a press commission, we should be considering a quasi-judicial body. Across many aspects of society, when it is deemed that the courts are too formal, long winded or costly to offer a reasonable and quick remedy, we have had much experience in the establishment of a variety of tribunals and appointments to them. I have experience of industrial relations, and much of the transformation in industrial relations over the past decade occurred as a result of industrial tribunals and the confidence that they have engendered in both sides of industry. A clear and sensible appeal procedure is available, and I should like us to take that direction.

I should like the promoter to accept that the implementation of this Bill and appointments made under it should be left with the most senior member of the judiciary. It is difficult not to feel strongly about the experiences of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), but moving to a system under the Lord Chancellor would not stifle the development of the Bill. Rather it would put it on a path for which there would be wider acceptability.

The role of such a body would be not only to hear complaints but to issue guidelines. I have difficulty understanding what this largely ill-defined body will do to establish guidelines without a clear indication of the methods that it must consider and what penalties will be available.

Bodies such as the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service have been charged with the duty of establishing guidelines to improve industrial relations. A solution to establishing a code of behaviour is not an insuperable problem, but the key to much of ACAS's success is that to a large degree it is voluntary and because of the treatment of its codes as evidence in hearings in industrial tribunals it carries much weight. The amendments that shift the balance from the Home Office to the Lord Chancellor and the judicial system must be an important step in the right direction for future Bills.

Under the proposed amendments the new body would be established by a statutory instrument. The House should have another opportunity to express its will before a Bill is passed because there are bound to be developments between now and then that hon. Members should take into account. I should be willing to support an amendment to that effect, but I am less enthusiastic about the other amendments that have been tabled, especially amendment No. 77, which proposes that initially the commission should comprise 21 members. I think that 21 members is far too many and should not like an amendment to expand that number because it could grow uncontrollably if there were no limits.

Although I share the disappointment of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie that his Bill will not get on the statute book, I hope that he will accept that there is a great deal of good will for his aims, even among hon. Members who have spoken against aspects of the Bill. We are looking forward to seeing legislation that will redress the considerable wrongs that undoubtedly exist in a way that we can accept.

Mr. Grocott: I should, perhaps, declare an interest as a member of the National Union of Journalists, although I do not agree with the approach of my union to the Bill. I also could not disagree more strongly with the views of the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), who said that he did not consider the Home Secretary to be the right person to deal with appointments to the press commission. The Home Secretary is precisely the right person for an extremely important reason. He already has the statutory

responsibility across broadcasting for ensuring that a range of objectives, similar to those we are trying to obtain in the Bill, are secured.

The Minister of State gave a wholly unacceptable reply to my earlier intervention. Home Office Ministers are responsible under the Broadcasting Act 1981 for the Independent Broadcasting Authority to satisfy itself that:

"all news in the programmes (in whatever form) is presented with due accuracy."

That is the responsibility throughout independent television. It is astonishing that the Home Office should take the view that it is important to ensure fairness, impartiality and accuracy in broadcasting, yet should not seem to be concerned to ensure those objectives for the press.

It is odd that Home Office Ministers should keep saying that the whole matter is unworkable. That was also the gist of the comments of the hon. Member for Elmet. Of course, concepts such as fairness, impartiality and accuracy are difficult and we could all debate them for hours, but it seems that we keep trying to rediscover the wheel. Such questions are asked and dealt with day in and day out by the people whose business is to be involved in broadcasting journalism, and such questions are dealt with by means of documents such as the television programme guidelines, which lay down sensible requirements about accuracy and the necessity to correct inaccuracies when they occur and, on live broadcasts, to ensure that the error is admitted as quickly as possible after the inaccuracy has occurred.

There are difficulties in implementing the guidelines, but no one believes that the regulations are a serious intrusion into the freedom of journalists and broadcasters. On the contrary, they enhance the quality of journalism. Journalists working in broadcasting do not feel inhibited by having to work under such guidelines. I have not yet met one journalist who has said that he will not leave printed journalism to join the broadcasting section because he would be hopelessly inhibited in what he could say. There is no shortage of people wanting to leave printed journalism to go into broadcasting.

These are commonsense rules and regulations. They are spelt out and are open for anyone to see. People can see copies of the television guidelines in the Library. One can complain if one feels that one has been treated unjustly and, ultimately, the Home Secretary has the statutory power to see, through the Independent Broadcasting Authority, that frequently offending companies are no longer able to broadcast when the franchises come up for review. No one sees such a regulatory framework as unfair or restrictive—the spectres raised by Conservative Members who suggested that we are trying to create a monster through this innocuous and gentle little Bill.

It is surely far better that the pressures and controls are made open. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) has left us. He sat through the earlier part of the debate and had I known that he would not be here when I spoke, I would have informed him accordingly. I thought that he might want to listen to the whole debate, rather than to rely on what the press has to say on the matter. It is astonishing for him to talk about restricting the freedom of the press when, as a senior Minister, he did his utmost to intimidate the BBC. I infinitely prefer regulations that are clearly spelt out and understood, and to which everyone can refer when the need arises, to the nasty little phone call and to the nod and the wink, more in keeping with the style of the right hon. Member for Chingford.

1.30 pm

What do we need to fear, and why is not the Home Office being consistent? I think that the Home Secretary should make the appointments and I await in vain a proper explanation of why the Government want to regulate broadcasting but not the press. I fear that the answer is the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher): they want broadcasting to follow the example of *The Sun*. Their approach will then have the merit of consistency, although it will be a deeply depressing day for freedom and for the accuracy, objectivity and quality of journalism.

The Government tell us that the proposed Broadcasting Bill takes the press as its model. The Home Secretary himself has said that it will give people the choice that they have when they thumb through newspapers in a newsagent's shop. There are two models for accurate news and current affairs reporting in this country. One is the press—in particular the tabloid press—and the other is public sector broadcasting. I know which model I prefer. It is absolutely essential that we are consistent in our approach to these matters, and to look to the example of the broadcast media is infinitely preferable to the alternative.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Ian Aitken—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"]—I am sorry, Mr. Jonathan Aitken.

Mr. Aitken: I have not changed sides yet, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) had a point when he complained about the possible lack of consistency in our approach towards broadcasting standards and standards in the press. Only last week, I was able to draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in a question to the fact that the Government and the Home Office had endorsed the latest EEC directive on broadcasting and television which enshrines in EEC legislation the principle of a right of reply. It is somewhat bizarre to find the Government apparently endorsing the right to reply by stealth in Brussels while being so oddly equivocal about it—to put it politely—in this place.

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend's words "by stealth" have stung me into action. My hon. Friend should know that the original draft of the EC directive contained the words "right of reply". We specifically arranged for that article to be changed to ensure that all that Britain had to do to comply with the directive was to continue with our Broadcasting Complaints Commission, which has existed for a long time and whose remit specifically and only covers

"unjust or unfair treatment . . . or unwarranted infringement of privacy in, or in connection with the obtaining of material included in, sound and television programmes."

Those are the limited objectives of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. The EC directive deals only with broadcasting, in any case, and we ensured that the relevant article was amended to make it clear that we should merely have to continue with our present Broadcasting Complaints Commission.

Mr. Aitken: Even that limited achievement would be welcome in legislation on the press. By the words "by stealth" I meant "by parliamentary stealth". The fact remains that the House has been given no opportunity whatever to debate the directive, which is a matter of some shame in the way in which we deal with European legislation.

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend has forgotten that the draft directive was debated way back in January 1987.

Mr. Aitken: We are getting away from the Bill. That was an extremely bad point. The directive, which has been massively redrafted, is heading for ratification by the Commission. As the Select Committee on European Legislation discovered the other day, it has not been properly debated. There has been quite a row on the matter. My hon. Friend the Minister may be more astray with his facts than I am. I want to get back to the new clause.

Mr. Gow: Is my hon. Friend aware that every one of his hon. Friends, with the sole exception—I am sorry to have to say this—of my hon. Friends the Minister and the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household agrees with him about that EEC directive? I want him to know that he has unanimous support, apart from the two present occupants of the Treasury Bench.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) said that he would like to get back to the new clause. I am sure that he will do so now.

Mr. Aitken: I am heartened by the unanimity of support for what I have said so far. I suspect that mine will be the only Conservative voice in favour of the much-maligned Bill. I am glad to support the new clause which was ably and amusingly moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow).

The new clause raises the issues whether the Bill should be handled by the Lord Chancellor and whether it should be delayed at the Lord Chancellor's discretion. I suspect that that was the prime purpose of my hon. Friend's thinking. Many experts on delaying tactics are present. I hardly think that it is necessary to drag in the poor old Lord Chancellor as a delaying long-stop. Nevertheless, although I support the Bill, I am not unduly critical of the delaying tactics which have been used by some of my hon. Friends. All is fair in love, war and parliamentary procedure, as the saying goes.

There is some merit in pausing and thinking about the Bill. Neither my hon. Friends nor the editors who have addressed us through a microphone over the past few days needed to have got quite so hot under the collar about the Bill. It is flawed to some extent, and the flaws were visible from the start. Three months ago, I wrote to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) to say that I would start with him on the Bill but that I had some doubts about whether I would finish with him. There are some genuine doubts, some of which may be resolved by the introduction of the delaying mechanism of the Lord Chancellor.

I pay a genuine tribute to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. He has done more than any other individual in recent memory to start the important process of cleaning up the Augean stables of the British tabloid press. There is wide agreement that the clean-up should take place. We seem to disagree on the methods by which it should take place. Should it involve statutory legislation? Should it involve the Home Secretary? Should it involve the Lord Chancellor?

I am attracted to the new clause, not least because of the persuasive arguments which were put forward on legal or quasi-legal grounds by my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste). The new clause envisages the Bill being passed and then being suspended like some legal sword of Damocles over the head of the British press until it can be dropped on it—presumably after acts of further misbehaviour—at the discretion of the Lord Chancellor. If we accept the new clause and pass the Bill, we will give the British press one last chance to put its own house in order. If it does not do so, the Bill—warts and all, flaws and all—will crash down on the head of what used to be called Fleet street.

The cry "Let's give the press one last chance" has been heard with great frequency and intensity in the past few days. There has been an almost hysterical reaction to the Bill from editorial writers, proprietors, editors and journalists. I have been much amused by all the comment. I was riveted to receive an expensive glossy brochure from Mr. Max Hasting, the editor of *The Daily Telegraph*. I was even more amused when the editor of the "Sunday Lonhro" addressed us all last Sunday in an editorial of *Guardian*-like length about the need to kill off the Bill. If there is one newspaper at what used to be called the quality end of the market that has sacrificed all pretence to integrity and impartiality, it is the "Sunday Lonhro" and its journalists—or, as they should now be called, 'Rowlandists'.

The serious aspect of press over-reaction to the Bill is that if only one tenth of the energy, dedication, crusading zeal and expense that the press put into opposing the Bill was devoted to putting its own house in order, there would be no need for the Bill and for Parliament to spend time on the matter. If the press does want to put its house in order, I see precious little sign of any serious intention to do so.

One of the ways in which the press could put its own house in order is to spend much more of its own money on the Press Council, giving that enfeebled but well-intentioned organisation better-paid staff, more professionals, and its own investigators, lawyers and publicity budget. The national press could well afford to do that. *The Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* make profits of more than £30 million a year. *The Sunday Times*, whose editor has been just as pompous as other editors in his comments on the Bill's weaknesses, makes more than £70 million per year. Its stablemate *The Sun*, makes more than £60 million per year. The national press as a whole is making unprecedented profits of about £250 million a year. What proportion of those enormous profits goes to the Press Council—the only alternative regulating body to that proposed in the Bill?

It is revealed on page 213 of the Press Council's 1988 annual report that the Newspaper Publishers Association, which represents the entire resources of all national newspapers, contributed £276,000—about 0·1 per cent., or one tenth of one per cent. of the profits of the national press—to the goal of self-regulation. I say to the press that it should put its money where its big mouth is. Instead of the Press Council having a £500,000 budget, it should have a budget of about £5 million to do the job that the Minister and the amendment want it to do.

In the absence of serious press money or intentions, new clause 5 returns to the whole question of statutory

regulation and who should enforce it—the Lord Chancellor or the Home Secretary. I am a late convert to the right of reply cause. For most of my own journalistic and political life I have held aloft the rather tattered banner of press freedom. I opposed the first right of reply Bill introduced by Mr. Frank Allaun. I am still nervous about supporting a measure that will undoubtedly impose restrictions on the press. One of the strong reasons for my nervousness is that most of the British press does not need or deserve right of reply legislation. We should all feel a certain sadness that so many decent national and regional newspapers that report the news fairly and honourably correct their own mistakes are confronted with a Bill of this kind because they are tarred with the brush of the lower tabloids. What a mean and dirty brush it is.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman remarks that many national and regional newpapers do not deserve the Bill. However, if they are careful about the accuracy of their reporting, they have nothing to fear from the Bill—contrary to the impression given by many journalists in editorials and features over the past few days.

Mr. Aitken I agree that the Bill, even with its undoubted flaws, does not hold out the threat of a sword of Damocles —as I called the amendment—to the decent press. After all, right of reply legislation exists in many other countries without provoking the excitable reaction we have witnessed over the past few days.

There is a cancer growing at the heart of the British press today. At the centre of that cancer is the fact that some tabloid newspapers have moved right away from reporting the news and from all forms of traditional journalism, investigative or otherwise. At the lower end of the tabloid market, journalism has been replaced by voyeurism. The reporter's profession has been infiltrated by a seedy stream of rent boys, pimps, bimbos, spurned lovers, smear artists bearing grudges, prostitutes and perjurers. It is a cast of shame which has not been seen in public since the trial of Oscar Wilde. Yet here it is propping up the pages of the tabloids with monotonous and tasteless regularity. That is the force that makes constituents say to Members of Parliament, "Get on and do something about it".

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman draws an excellent analogy between the lack of a right of reply in the United Kingdom and its existence in other countries. Does he agree that Britain and Australia are the two countries with the most concentrated ownership of newspapers and, possibly, the worst quality of tabloids in the world? Countries with a diversity of ownership tend to have a far better quality of average newspaper than we have.

1.45 pm

Mr. Aitken: The concentration of ownership is undesirable. As the story of the Irishman goes, "I would not have started from here" with this concentration of ownership in the British press or with the even greater concentration that exists in the Australian press.

There could, however, be some advantages in the concentration of ownership when it comes to cleaning up the act. It is not circulation wars, competition or the fight for profits that have brought about this unhappy position. It is, to use an old-fashioned label, the moral standards of certain proprietors and editors which has caused the rot to set in. A newspaper, like a fish, rots from the head downwards. Certain newspaper proprietors have given encouragement and promotion to a thoroughly evil clique of lower tabloid editors, whose ruthlessness and recklessnes with the truth is so notorious that their papers publish lies regularly and unashamedly.

The House is considering the Bill because Parliament thinks that it is time for the lying to have to stop. The question is: who will stop it? Clearly, the Government are not keen to stop it now. Until today their most memorable contribution to the argument about standards in the lower tabloids was to recommend the previous editor of *The Sun* for a knighthood. So much for Victorian values.

The announcement today of my hon. Friend the Minister that the British tabloids are now on probation is like putting Jack the Ripper or the Boston strangler on probation. It is not likely to be effective. One then turns to the courts, which brings me to the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet. Can the courts in any judicial form with the help of the Lord Chancellor, whose role in this is important, do anything to stop the lying? They are doing their best. Juries' massive awards of libel damages are a symptom of the public's distaste for what is going on, but for every Koo Stark, Elton John or Jeffery Archer, there are 50 ordinary individuals libelled just as gravely in terms of loss of reputation, who simply cannot afford to use the libel laws to seek redress. Courts of law, like the Ritz hotel, are open only to those who can afford them.

The tabloids now write into their editorial budgets costs for settling libel actions. It is a lie now, pay later habit. If a tabloid makes as much as £1 million a week, settling two or three libel actions at £30,000 or £40,000 a time makes a small dent in the profits.

To illustrate how ineffective the courts are, even at the most excitable and dramatic end of the scale, I shall run through the most spectacular libel case of them all. This will show why we need the involvement of the Lord Chancellor. The case of Elton John *v. The Sun* was the worst of its kind, not just because of the viciousness of *The Sun's* smear capaign or size of the libel damages, but because of the fascinating insight which it gave the world into the techniques and tactics of the newspaper, particularly from the moment after it knew that it had made a disastrous mistake.

The headlines tell their own story. On 25 February 1987, *The Sun* newspaper splashed across its front page: "Elton in Vice Boys Scandal". On the next day the headline was, "Elton's Kinky Kinks"; on the next, "Elton's Drug Capers" and on the next, "Elton's Pink Tutu Party". There was a series of allegations about drugs, male prostitutes and bondage. Every smear, criminal and moral, was in those articles.

Those stories were prepared by the editor of *The Sun*, Mr. Kelvin MacKenzie, and appeared under the byline of his brother, Mr. Craig MacKenzie. That was the gentleman who *The Independent* told us has a nickname in the confines of *The Sun* of the "bouncing bog brush". Mr. Murdoch is not in favour of jobs for the boys, but he appears to be in favour of jobs for the brothers and jobs for the bog brushes.

Those bouncing bog brushes smeared their filth for days and days across the front page of the newspaper. However, there was a central flaw in those stories. They were entirely made up. They were sheer unadulterated fiction. The basis for those stories was uncorroborated allegations contributed by a rent boy, who appeared in *The*

[Mr. Aitken]

Sun as Mr. Graham X, but whose real name was Mr. Stephen Hardy. He was paid by *The Sun* £2,000 down and a retainer of £250 a week.

In a riveting feature published in *The Independent* magazine, published in February, Stephen Hardy said:

"97 per cent. of it was untrue. I would give The Sun a line and they would write it all up. It was a manufactured story."

What is fascinating about that, and why we need the Lord Chancellor, as suggested in new clause 5, is that *The Sun* discovered early in the procedure that it was horribly wrong. It had clearly not done its homework, it had not checked the story and it knew that it was printing lies.

What did *The Sun* do, however, when at the very start of the procedure, Mr. Elton John, through his lawyers, sought a retraction, an apology and a right of reply? Despite knowing that it was wrong—after printing the big lie—it decided it would win through by going for a bigger lie. It then doubled its pressure, as can be seen from the headline on 27 February, which said: "You're a Liar Elton." I might add that that is a familiar technique of *The Sun*.

There was a famous Press Council ruling about a Wapping lorry driver called Mr. McCabe. *The Sun* printed all kinds of nonsence about him and he went to the Press Council. He obtained a ruling in his favour. *The Sun* then printed the Press Council's ruling under the headline,

"You're Still a Lying Trucker."

The Sun continued to scour the planet for more filth on Mr. Elton John. It paid £10,000 for polaroid pictures of him nude with a man, which had nothing to do with its original allegations. *The Independent* said:

"The Sun's game plan was to keep on hitting Elton John so hard that he would give up long before the judge heard the matter."

That is what *The Sun* tried to do, but Elton John stuck to his guns and he received £1 million in libel damages and an apology from *The Sun*—which infuriated the judge—"Sorry, Elton." It was a cheeky style of apology.

The story of *The Sun's* handling of that case has clearly shown what its moral standards are. Paying £1 million must have hurt even Mr. Murdoch's pockets, but clearly it was not enough. Mr. MacKenzie is still in his place. No one appears to have been fired over the incident. There has been no proper apology to the public or to the readers. As the judge said in the case of Elton John, it was a pretty cheeky kind of apology that was eventually printed. Therefore, it is not satisfactory to say that the courts are adequately handling the matter through the antique machinery of the libel laws. If *The Sun* is making more than £1 million a week, it can afford to pay £1 million in damages.

The Press Council has been held up by the Minister as a great shield and the reason we do not need the Bill: warts and all, the Press Council will do the job for us. However, in the past the Press Council has been absurdly weak and ineffective. We are asked to believe that the arrival of Louis Blom-Cooper—my hon. Friend paid tribute to him when moving the new clause—means that all will change. It is believed that somehow Hercules has arrived at the Augean stables or Superman has reached the sewage farm. We had the same high hopes when Sir Zelman Cowan was brought from Australia. He presided over the most disastrous deterioration of standards in the history of Fleet Street.

I am somewhat underwhelmed by the prospect of Mr. Blom-Cooper's new broom. I wish him well, but there are many things wrong with the Press Council. Editors do not have to appear in person, but I am glad that the NUJ is to take up Press Council membership; that is a step in the right direction. Complainants have no right to an oral inquiry, the findings, if published at all, are published in much too small type and, above all, the Press Council lacks resources.

What on earth is there to stop another Elton John, another McCabe, another spate of excesses? We see them almost daily in the tabloid newspapers. In the end the buck must come back to us. It is all very well to say that the press is on probation and that we should give it one more chance. I would love to believe that that approach would work, but I believe that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie has done the House and the country a fine service. His Bill is full of flaws and, under parliamentary scrutiny, perhaps it does not deserve to reach the statute book yet—perhaps we need new clause 5 as a long stop.

In the end, unless there is a real change of heart, a new direction of resources and a new determination by the press to clean up its act, we will be back in business again, with some form of ferocious and totally deserved restrictive legislation on the press, which all of us would greatly regret.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I intend to be brief. We have just listened to a delightful speech from the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken). The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not try to follow him in wisdom and humour and if I try to stick to the amendment.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who introduced the new clause, is a bit unfair on the Lord Chancellor. I would have thought that he had enough problems on his hands dealing with the lawyers, of whom the hon. Gentleman is one, and he should leave the journalists alone. Lord Chief Justice Lane has ludicrously said that the Lord Chancellor is wearing a swastika on his arm and that he is leaning towards the right of Fascism. Lord Justice Donaldson is organising a strike and Queen's counsellors in this House are meeting in the all-party barrister's committee upstairs plotting the Lord Chancellor's downfall and, no doubt, his death. A previous Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, has said that the Lord Chancellor and the Prime Minister are guilty of ideological baloney. I would have thought that that was enough for anyone to deal with and a good enough reason for leaving the Home Office to deal with this Bill.

I am sure that the Lord Chancellor would have been rather puzzled if he had read the papers this week. He would have pondered on how an unholy alliance has come about between the Home Secretary, the editor of *The Guardian*, Peter Preston, the editor of *The Observer*, Donald Trelford and the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Even the right hon. Gentleman must admit that it is an unholy alliance and that it was not always thus. I am sure that we were all pleased to see that the right hon. Gentleman took about £11,000 from *The Guardian* for telling lies about him, but I also understand that such an alliance will not always exist in the future. I believe that Donald Trelford, editor of *The Observer* is trying to make unkind comments about the right hon. Gentleman when he was Secretary of State for Industry concerning some

shop and the House of Fraser. But they have all come together in a grand alliance and I am sure that the Lord Chancellor will be worried about that.

One serious argument in favour of handing over some of the responsibilities for the Bill to the Lord Chancellor's Department was highlighted when my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) compared the regulation of television with the regulation of the press. I speak as someone who worked in television for four years and as a Member of the NUJ who writes a bit now and then.

There is a genuine worry about the Home Office running the Bill, which might be a good argument in favour of the Lord Chancellor. The Home Office has used a system of censorship that has, for a long time, been secretive and unpleasant. Last night I was reading some history about the way in which censorship has operated in broadcasting. I asked myself whether we want the Home Secretary and, with great respect, the Minister present to have anything to do with the Bill? I thought back to the early 1980s when a television programme "Death of a Princess" was broadcast. Immediately the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary responded to criticism from Saudi Arabia and said that trade was more important than freedom of speech. They believed that we should censor that programme and that we should not show it again. More recently, I thought about another drama documentary. "Tumbledown", which dealt with the Falklands war. The Home Office made quiet noises, saying "We really do not think that this programme should be shown. There ought to be some censorship—some restriction of freedom of expression."

2 pm

I thought about another television programme, "Death on the Rock". Again, the Home Office made it clear that it did not want the programme to be shown. I remember "Real Lives", a television film in which a former Home Secretary was shifted elsewhere and then shunted off to Europe as part of his hurry-on-down process—I refer to Sir Leon Brittan.

I thought of the Zircon film, which again the Home Office did not want shown and which was suppressed. I thought of "My Country, right or wrong", another BBC programme that the Home Office wanted to be suppressed. I even thought of a drama which the Home Office had managed to stop, "Left Over People" by Tom Pickard. I remembered the BBC's attempts to secure a repeat of a drama called "United Kingdom" by Roland Joffé, on which I was a researcher.

Surely it would be better for the Bill to be dealt with by the Lord Chancellor than by the Home Secretary and the Minister who tried to censor all those programmes. The Home Office's record of censorship is appalling. Why are the editors of so-called radical papers, Peter Preston of *The Guardian* and Donald Trelford of *The Observer*, forming an unholy alliance to blast off against my hon. Friend's modest little Bill? It makes me wonder whether someone ought to pass the sick bag.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): The new clause and amendments raise two important questions—first, whether the Bill should come into effect on the day on which it is passed or at a later date, and, secondly, whether the Home Secretary or the Lord Chancellor should administer it.

The amendments, and the debate on them, illustrate the difficulties of the Bill, which I mentioned on Second Reading—the confusion between the judicial remedies and the types of remedy provided by the Press Council and the press commission, and the constitutional difficulty of Government-appointed nominees correcting factual errors in the press.

Obviously no Minister is rushing forward to carry out the responsibilities imposed by the Bill. The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) seemed to see some sinister reason for the Government's lack of enthusiasm for the task, but I see some virtue in their reluctance to grapple with such powers. That reluctance stems from a recognition of the constitutional dangers of Government becoming involved in the correction of errors in the press. The examples quoted by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) illustrate the possible difficulties of a confrontation between the Government and the press about a number of sensitive matters.

I accept that, when circumstances require the exercise of something resembling judicial functions, there is a strong case for making the Lord Chancellor responsible for appointments and for the administration of the legislation. Recommendations have been made that planning and transport inspectors should come under the aegis of the Lord Chancellor, and I see the force of such arguments in the present context. I suggest that the duties that the Bill would impose would sit uneasily with the Lord Chancellor's other duties. The appointment of the Lord Chancellor to this task implies that the body to be created would be a much more judicial body than would really be the case. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is involved with broadcasting and television, I am led to the conclusion that, if a Minister is to be given the job, it should be given to him rather than to the Lord Chancellor.

I hope that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) will tell us what he thinks about the starting date of the Bill. He says that history will be on the side of the Bill, but at no point did I hear him say that Opposition Front Bench spokesmen are behind it or its starting date. I heard him speak on Second Reading and I listened to his speech today. I should like him to clarify when, if at all, he considers that the Bill ought to come into force.

I listened with great sympathy to what was said by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) both on Second Reading and again today, and I share the admiration that has been expressed about the way he has conducted the Bill. However, the two difficulties that I have mentioned prevent me from supporting it. I believe that we should benefit from a delay in the starting date of the Bill, if it were to reach the statute book, in order to assess the reforms that the Press Council is undertaking. I envisage greater benefits from the reform of the Press Council than from the somewhat inadequate remedies that the Bill contains.

For those reasons, I do not support the inclusion of the Lord Chancellor in the Bill. I support, however, the deferment of the starting date so that there may be more time for further reflection.

Mr. Tebbit: I oppose the new clause for slightly different reasons from those that were given by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). As is known, there has been an unholy

[Mr. Tebbit]

alliance between myself and Mr. Peter Preston, who courageously published in his newspaper an article by me that attacked strongly his newspaper's record on this matter and brought out the fact that I had been forced to go to law to clear my name after an unfair and untrue allegation was published in his paper. That shows an element of courtesy and decency by *The Guardian*. I do not usually praise that newspaper, so I take this opportunity to do so.

The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch made the interesting point that he does not trust the Home Secretary to deal with these matters because of his record on the electronic media. He ought, therefore, to come all the way with me and say that he does not trust the record of Ministers or politicians as showing that they have any influence whatsoever over what the press should or should not publish. In that case, he would become, with me, an opponent of the Bill in general.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) said, that does not mean that there is not a great deal that is wrong with certain sections of the press. If we can find a way to bring more pressure to bear on them to change their attitudes, I am all for it. What gives me the greatest unease—whether it is the Lord Chancellor or the Home Secretary—is that Ministers would have the power to appoint people to what is called a press commission that would inevitably seek more and more power to deal with what the commission regard as press abuses.

We should not accept the new clause, although it was introduced so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), because when something gets into the hands of the legal profession and the Lord Chancellor it moves away from things that we ordinary mortals may comment on into a rarefied area where people go all judicial on us. It is very difficult to get Law Officers into a debate in the House about the conduct of their Department's affairs. It is not nearly so difficult to deal with a Secretary of State or a Home Secretary. That is why I disagree with my hon. Friend.

The most important result of the activities of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie is that the Government have been forced to think seriously about the extent of their responsibility for putting pressure on the press to publish or not to publish. I am totally against the so-called right of reply being a statutory right enforced by state-appointed commissioners. Quite rightly, the Government have concluded that they should conduct a broad-based inquiry and we should await any recommendations that might be produced.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the appointment of commissioners, is he not terrified at the fact that clause 6 suggests that the commissioners

"shall issue guidelines and advice as necessary to improve editorial standards."?

Does that not mean that Government-appointed commissioners could begin to judge exactly what the editorial content of newspapers may or may not be? That would be an extremely slippery slope.

Mr. Tebbit: To stay precisely in order, I have not referred to my amendment which would remove those powers from the press commission, if it were ever to be created.

As a consequence of the efforts of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie and my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) newspaper proprietors must be beginning to think that, however many friends of the free press sit in the House—and I believe that the great majority of us believe in the concept of a free press—sooner or later we shall be rolled over by the forces of those who are prepared to dilute the freedom of the press to deal with a perceived wrong. That would be extremely dangerous.

Like many of the other irritants of democracy that we have to put up with, a free press is part of the price we have to pay. I am willing to pay that price. I have been hurt by the press more than once. Occasionally one can come back on the press, if one has the resources to do so. Most people cannot, but it is part of the price we pay for democracy. The press barons have to acknowledge that part of the price they must pay for the right to run newspapers, make profits out of newspapers and influence opinion through newspapers is that those newspapers have to be decent in the terms set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken). It has been noticed that a certain group of newspapers appears to have changed slightly. Another group of newspapers adopts various standards for different newspapers in the group.

I would not say that the *Daily Mirror* is guiltless. Such headings as, "And you're a liar too", and "You're still a liar" did not only appear in *The Sun*, but also appeared in the *Daily Mirror*. There would be great disputes across the Floor of the House and elsewhere as to whether those headlines were true.

Standards have to be improved and today's debate must send a signal to those press barons saying, "If you want to continue to be in business with a free press in a free country, you must consider whether, exceptionally, a proprietor has not only the right but the responsibility to put pressure on his editors to behave in a manner which would enhance the reputation of the press and not damage it."

Mr. Fisher: To my surprise, I find myself in sympathy with much of what was said by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Like him, I cannot support the new clause, even though I enjoyed the amusing and elegant way in which it was moved by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). I was somewhat surprised, even shocked, by the vicious attack he launched on his right hon. Friend—I use the word "Friend" loosely or conventionally—the Secretary of State for Wales. Such clear splits in the Government so close to the by-election in the Vale of Glamorgan will have been noted.

2.15 pm

The hon. Member for Eastbourne raised some important issues. He addressed himself most clearly to the question of which Department should have responsibility for appointment. The prior and implicit issue raised in that is whether any Department should be involved. It is on this point that I have sympathy with the right hon. Member for Chingford. If we are serious about the independence of the press and broadcasting, we have to do everything we can to loosen Government ties. That is easier said than done. It is not only a matter of legislation. It is potently a matter of patronage in the appointment of members of the BBC, the IBA and commissions such as the press commission.

Although I strongly support everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has done in promoting the Bill, he knows that we have had differences of opinion and that I have some grave reservations about this part of the Bill. It leaves to the Government—any Government—patronage in appointing members of the press commission. We have to find some way of establishing independence. That is not easy, and it is not something that Her Majesty's Opposition have yet cracked.

The growth of patronage spreads across and weakens public life. The fingers of Government, whichever party is in power, are spread so widely across many public bodies in which it is not only unnecessary but counter-productive for the Government to be involved. Therefore, I agree with the right hon. Member for Chingford. However, the methods that one can envisage of creating independence in any such body and finding other ways through which those people can be appointed are either cumbersomely democratic or not yet clear to me.

Mr. Tebbit: It is not often that we find ourselves in so much agreement. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to come with me the next step of the way and say that it would be infinitely preferable if we did not have to have these forms of control, which inevitably mean that somebody—and who else but the Government?—has to appoint commissioners of some sort. I look forward to the day when there are as many channels on our radio and television as there are channels available in the press and when we can get rid of Government control of any sort, except in respect of decency, over television and radio. I hope that he will join me in that view.

Mr. Fisher: The right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to know that I will not join him in that view. There is a great deal of difference between the Government having a direct influence and control through patronage, and the responsibility of the Government, on behalf of our society, to set a framework that protects the rights of individuals and in which a diversity of programmes can be ensured in our broadcasting media.

Mr. Grocott: At the risk of driving a further wedge between my hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) I must say that if there is to be Government involvement, it is better that it is understood and in statute than if it is the type of Government pressure that came from the right hon. Member for Chingford when he was a senior Minister in the Government. He applied quite nasty pressure on the BBC but he has been honest enough to admit that. I put it to him once that he had made veiled threats to the leaders of the BBC and he was honest enough to say, "When I make threats, they are not veiled."

Mr. Fisher: That succinct turn of phrase has a ring of authenticity. The right hon. Member for Chingford is nodding to confirm that he is the true author and begetter of the phrase. The phrase does him more credit than the instinct. I was in my local radio station the day after he made that statement in September or October 1986, and the effect of it on senior and experienced journalists was worrying. They were struck and concerned by such overt pressure from someone who was then a senior member of the Government.

Mr. Tebbit: The essence of the remark was that if I had made a threat it would have been open because I do not make behind-the-doors threats, such as those that have been made by some Governments in the past. I made no threat whatever because there was no open threat. The hon. Gentleman will not find on the record anywhere a threat that I made against the broadcasting authorities. There was a lot of pressure, yes, to tell the truth and to balance it fairly, but no threat.

Mr. Fisher: I think that we are getting into semantics, and I want to deal with the central point of the amendment —which Department should be responsible.

Curiously, under this Government and previous Governments, press matters are dealt with by the Department of Trade and Industry. The broadcasting world has been interested by the power struggle between the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Home Secretary. I am glad that in this instance the Home Secretary has been supreme and that the Minister of State, Home Office has guided the legislation.

Mr. Skinner: I have just had an article passed to me about the right of reply. It appears that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) has been busily demanding a right of reply of the *Waltham Guardian* of 20 April 1989. The right hon. Gentleman complained in a letter that his name had been left out. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and other hon. Members are mentioned in this article. Although the right hon. Member for Chingford opposes this Bill, he demanded a right of reply from the editor of the *Waltham Guardian* and got one. The editor says; "Our apologies to Mr. Tebbit for the arm twisting". No, that is not him. He says:

"The omission was due to a paragraph falling off at the printers. Of course he has played a part in trying to remedy the Waltham Forest court situation, which we reported, and we are grateful to him and the borough's two other MPs. We are always ready to publish corrections to these reports where inaccuracies make a fundamental difference."

The truth is that if many people in Waltham Forest had written to the editor and said, "I want my letter printed and a right of reply" they would have been refused.

Mr. Fisher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that interesting and intriguing intervention.

Labour Members do not believe that the Department of Trade and Industry is the best Department to deal with the newspaper industry, because, like broadcasting, it is not just another industry but a key element in the culture and communications of our society. The public agenda, values, traditions, and ideas of our society are sustained and carried by the press, so it must not be dealt with like textiles or other industries. It is essentially a cultural industry and should be so handled.

For the same reasons the Labour party is concerned that the Home Office is involved in the Bill. A Department that has responsibilities for prisons, probation and the control of immigration is not the appropriate Department to ensure the right of reply.

I share many of the concerns that were expressed passionately and eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), when he went through the Government's disgraceful record on editorial interference in programmes such as "Real Lives" and "My Country Right or Wrong", the injunctions on the BBC's "Death on the Rock" and the refusal to accept the Windlesham report. There was also

[Mr. Fisher]

their pressure through injunctions on *The Guardian, The Independent* and other newspapers, which is relevant to the Bill.

Mr. Renton: I greatly resent those ridiculous remarks. Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that it is because of our wish to protect the freedom of the press that we have been carefully neutral on this Bill and the Protection of Privacy Bill despite the support for them from Members of all parties? We are anxious that there should be no statutory control of the press.

Mr. Fisher: The Government are incapable of protecting editorial independence in the press or broadcasting, so they do not recommend themselves as being likely to protect the rights of the public through the right of reply. The Government's record is against them.

For the same reason I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne who proposed that the matter should be dealt with by the Lord Chancellor's Department. We are dealing with issues of culture, communications, access, editorial independence, and freedom of speech and information. A Labour Government will set up a Ministry to deal with the arts and the media—*[Interruption.]* We made it clear at the last general election that we would do that. The Ministry would have responsibility for the press and would be the most suitable Ministry for protecting editorial independence. Broadcasting, publishing and the press have issues such as access and editorial independence in common, but they have little in common with prisons, the probation service and immigration.

The next Labour Government will introduce a Bill dealing with the right of reply, although it will not be in precisely the same form as the present Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie has often said, he has tried to carry hon. Members of a wide range of opinions with him, so he has pared down the Bill to its essence. He has removed broadcasting, which is included in such legislation in many other European countries and he has removed other elements. The possible defeat of the Bill gives the Labour party time to consider afresh the form in which it will introduce a similar Bill when in government which other hon. Members will support. It will be part of a package that protects the consumer against the unbridled power of the press and protects editorial independence and the strength of journalists. We desperately need freedom of information legislation to protect the rights of journalists, just as we must protect the right of reply for individuals. The House has accepted the principle that the public have such a right of reply. Next, we must introduce such a Bill.

Mr. Worthington: I want to express my appreciation to all the supporters of the Bill for the help that they have given. I also want to express my appreciation to the oppontents of the Bill. An enormous amount of help has been given to the framing of future legislation on the right of reply. We recognise the complexities of the issue, and Labour Members have a genuine addiction to a free press. I also welcome the Minister's statement that there is to be a review of matters of privacy and related issues. But I am sure that the Minister will recognise that his statement has rivalled any in the past in its vagueness about the remit of the review, and he made no statement on who was to chair it.

Let me conclude by emphasising the seriousness of this matter. Next week will be the first anniversary of the death of a young actor called David Scarboro who used to be in East Enders. His family, his fellow villagers and many of his colleagues on the cast of East Enders believe that his death was brought about largely by press harassment yet the *News of the World* and *The Sun* never acknowledged their part in the misery that that lad's life became. I hope that we shall remember cases like that as we wait for the Press Council to try to put its house in order.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Private Members' Bills

INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ORGANISATIONS (REGISTRATIONS) BILL

Order read for consideration in Committee.

Hon. Members: Object.
Committee Friday 28 April.

LOTTERIES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not printed.

ABORTION (RIGHTS OF ANCILLARY WORKERS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [10 February.]

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

INSTALLATION OF SMOKE DETECTORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

SCOTLAND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

FUEL AND ENERGY PROVISION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 May.

PROTECTION OF RESIDENTS IN RETIREMENT HOMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

HOUSING THE HOMELESS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 April.

FUNERAL INDUSTRY (CODE OF PRACTICE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LONDON GOVERNMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

JUNIOR HOSPITAL DOCTORS (REGULATION OF HOURS) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 April.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE, ARBITRATION, PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 May.

RELIGIOUS PROSECUTIONS (ABOLITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 July.

INDECENT DISPLAYS (NEWSPAPERS AND WORKPLACES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 April.

AGE OF LEGAL CAPACITY (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

GAMING MACHINES (PROHIBITION ON USE BY PERSONS UNDER EIGHTEEN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till 12 May

RIDERS OF EQUINE ANIMALS (WEARING OF PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 April.

COUNTING WOMEN'S UNREMUNERATED WORK BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker Second Reading what day? No day named.

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 May.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 May.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 25th April, the Motion in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Health and Safety may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon; and if proceedings thereon have not been disposed of at the end of that period, Mr. Speaker shall then put the Question.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Fullerton Hospital, Doncaster

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

2.34 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I am pleased to have this opportunity to draw to the attention of the House the disastrous consequences that the closure of Fullerton hospital will have for the local community. The importance of the matter is evidenced by the presence of so many hon. Friends. Fullerton hospital was built by the Denaby-Conisbrough community many years ago, to provide facilities for and to meet the demands of local people. Cadeby and Denaby pits were major contributors to the building of that hospital. However, when the National Health Service was created, the local community had no hesitation in seeing that Fullerton was a part of the service.

The building has not had much spent on it in the past. Nevertheless, it is still a substantial building which has stood the test of time. It is surrounded by gardens, providing a healthy environment for patients in their twilight years. There was a need for Fullerton when it was built, and there is still a need for it now.

The two wards at Montagu hospital will not stand the test of time and will require substantial amounts of money spent on them if they are to remain in use in, possibly, 10 years. Also, Montagu hospital does not have the same environment as Fullerton.

Doncaster hospital has one of the lowest administration costs in the country. It has been and still is nurse-oriented, but, because of the way in which the Government funded the pay rise last year, Doncaster now has financial difficulties. If that were not so and if the Government had played the game with the health authority, I would not be making this case for Fullerton hospital this afternoon.

By closing Fullerton hospital and thus reducing services, £100,000 will be saved to fulfil the previous commitment to Montagu hospital—robbing Peter to pay Paul, or hand-to-mouth short-term policies. I honestly believe that the long-term needs of the Doncaster area will be met only by long-term planning. If the authority did not have such financial problems, which are through no fault of its own, it would have opened a children's wing.

Last week, I received a letter from the Minister, drawing my attention to this new development. But there is no money to staff it. Is the Minister suggesting that another old folks hospital such as Fullerton should be closed to get the money to provide the staff? The Cancer Trust in Doncaster is providing a hospice. Doncaster health authority cannot meet the promise on the staffing of it.

There is a cash crisis in Doncaster, and the closure of Fullerton will result in several premature deaths. The closure of Fullerton has no relation to the future needs of Doncaster. We must ask whether we are to provide love and care for our elderly or allow them to end their lives alone and unwanted. Society owes it to them to allow them to end their lives in dignity, and we should show them some compassion in their twilight years. That is the hallmark of a civilised society. The problem is a growing number of elderly people and the absence of any long-term strategy to cope with them.

We still await the Government's reponse to the Griffiths report, which is wanted as quickly as possible and should be considered in conjunction with the Wagner report. There is a national discrepancy between the number of residential and National Health Service beds of about 25,000. For humane reasons alone, there is a case for keeping Fullerton open until the sums are correct. If Fullerton closes, that will have terrible consequences for a long-term policy has yet to be determined.

Trent regional health authority has no long-term plans. According to a recent parliamentary answer, Trent is still holding consultations and reviewing its strategy. Examination of Doncaster's population shows that those aged between 75 and 85 numbered 12,785 in 1986. By 1996, that figure will grow to 14,290—an increase of 11·8 per cent. By 2006, that aged population will grow to 15,720 —an increase of 23 per cent. In 1986, those aged 85 or more in Doncaster totalled 2,750. By 1996, that figure will grow to 3,161—an increase of 14·9 per cent. By 2006, the figure will be 5,070—an 84·3 per cent. increase. Those figures are horrendous.

The local authority will not be able to assist because the average age of those in local authority care is 82. More than 80 per cent. of all residents in social service care are more than 75 years of age. Everyone knows that local authority part III accommodation is under stress. Because of the make-up of our population, social services are the second biggest spenders in the local authority. The local authority has suffered a one.third reduction in rate support grant since the Government were elected in 1979, and one can see the effect that that has had.

The Dearne valley is a deprived area, and that is why the Government, with the co-operation of the local authority, are endeavouring to lift morale. However, with the proposed closure, the health authority will undermine the work both of the Government and of the local authority.

Because of high unemployment, many people leave the area to seek work. It is the young and active who leave, giving rise to an imbalance in the population and to a disproportionate number of the infirm and elderly to be looked after. The family unit is split up, because if the young go away to seek work, they cannot take with them their elderly or infirm parents. As a consequence, the local authority has to provide care services. Other family members who remain are faced with Government regulations that hit those wishing to meet their family responsibilities, because the care allowance is so small. Looking after their parents could financially affect their own families.

I turn to the Trent regional health authority report, a copy of which I presume the Minister has. The report of the health authority's sub-committee gives the background to the proposed relocation. The sub-committee took just five minutes to discuss that important subject, which is deplorable. Paragraph 1.2 of the report states:

"Fullerton Hospital . . . currently provides a maximum of 34 beds."

However, it is stated later:

"There are currently 25 beds in use at Fullerton Hospital."

That represents a deliberate policy of run-down by the local authority in advance of the Minister's decision.

Paragraph 1.3.3 talks about paramedics, but not with this type of patient. I should like the Minister to look at some photographs I have here because they depict the type of patient. Paragraph 1.3 talks about Fullerton having to be served from Montagu hospital. Montagu hospital is already linked with Doncaster royal infirmary, so I do not see any difference between DRI-Montagu and Montagu-Fullerton.

Paragraph 1.3.4 talks about savings of £100,000. I question whether that is a true figure. Certainly when one takes into consideration humanitarian aspects, money pales into insignificance. Paragraph 1.3.5 talks about appropriate medical care, but it is rubbish. Fullerton is better. Paragraph 1.4 talks about the relocation of services. Could we not have a ballot of staff, patients and the community on that?

I pay tribute to the staff and friends of Fullerton hospital. They have played a tremendous role in the past and have been instrumental in adding many years to patients' lives. Paragraph 3.2.2 talks about giving the name "Fullerton" to a ward at Montagu hospital. That is a load of rubbish. Paragraph 3.2.3 talks about upgrading, but, because of the financial problems of Doncaster, that will not take place. I do not think that the proposals in paragraph 3.2.4 will take place either.

Paragraph 3.2.5 talks about Conisbrough hospital being at risk. Unless we get cash to maintain services, we are on a downward spiral. Paragraph 3.2.6 will be affected by restrictions on finances. All I can say on paragraph 3.2.7 is that Doncaster council has its own financial problems. One must question whether paragraph 3.2.9 is correct. Money problems will affect paragraph 3.3. For those reasons we need to look again.

"The principles that adequate health care should be provided to all regardless of ability to pay must be the foundation of any arrangements for financing the Health Service."

Those are not my words, but those of the Prime Minister at the Conservative party conference in 1982 and repeated in the 1983 Conservative party manifesto.

I pay tribute to all those connected with Fullerton. They have done a tremendous job in the past and would do so in future. Will the Minister instruct the health authority to consult the patients and the staff at Fullerton, and the people of Doncaster? If he does, there will be an overwhelming majority, indeed a unanimous vote, to keep Fullerton open. I plead with the Minister on behalf of the elderly who have been served so well in the past and on behalf of my constituents to intervene and keep Fullerton open.

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on his success in the ballot. I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a keen interest in the welfare of his constituents and in the affairs of his local district health authority, Doncaster, and its region, Trent. The hon. Gentleman pursues that interest with great energy and vigour. I am well aware that the hon. Gentleman served as vice-chairman of Doncaster health authority in 1982. I am sure that the House appreciates the clear and direct way in which he has presented the arguments on behalf of his constituents. As he knows, I stood for election in his constituency in 1979, and I have great respect for him, for his constituents and for the county of South Yorkshire.

Fullerton hospital has been serving the people of Doncaster for more than three quarters of a century—initially providing acute services to the local area and for

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

many years catering for orthopaedic patients transferred from the Doncaster royal infirmary. In recent years the hospital has been used to provide continuing care for elderly patients. Given that history, I well understand the intense feelings of loyalty that it arouses among the local community. The health advisory service, when it looked at services for the elderly in Doncaster at the end of 1987, praised the good quality of care being given at Fullerton. I should like to echo what the health advisory service said and put on record the Government's appreciation of the tremendous efforts and dedication of the hospital's staff over many years.

I know, too, that there has been considerable uncertainty about the future of Fullerton hospital for some time now and that proposals to close the hospital were put forward two years ago, but later withdrawn. I am sure that it is in everyone's interest for that uncertainty to be ended quickly. The health advisory service advised Doncaster health authority to include Fullerton in its reconsideration of the disposition of beds for the elderly.

It would be quite wrong for me to comment further on the current proposal, because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, it is about to be referred to Ministers. I understand that it will reach the Ministry next week. It might, however, be helpful if I were to outline where matters stand at present on the health authority's proposal.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that there is an established procedure that must be followed before the closure or change of use of National Health Service facilities. Doncaster health authority issued a consultation document in October last year in which it proposed to transfer 35 beds for the elderly from Fullerton hospital to the Montagu hospital two miles away in Mexborough, with a view to the Fullerton closing later this year.

The local community health council objected to the proposal to transfer services to Mexborough Montagu hospital and to close Fullerton and so the matter was subsequently referred to the regional health authority, where it was considered by a members' panel. I know that that panel visited Fullerton hospital and the wards at Montagu hospital to which it is proposed that services should transfer and met representatives of staff and the local community.

At its meeting on 10 April, the regional health authority endorsed the recommendation of the members' panel and approved Doncaster health authority's proposal to close Fullerton, subject to a number of conditions being met. Doncaster district health authority has indicated that it will be able to comply with those conditions. Doncaster community health council still wishes to object in the light of the conditions the regional health authority has placed on implementation of the closure. The hon. Gentleman outlined some of those objections. The proposal will therefore come to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of state for Health for a final decision.

As I have said, I cannot comment further on the proposal at this stage, because I do not wish to prejudice that decision. I do, however, understand the concern that has been expressed today on the subject. I can promise the hon. Member for Don Valley that when the proposal does come to the Department we shall give the matter the very careful consideration that it clearly deserves. In doing so, I can assure him that full account will be taken of the points which he has made so clearly this afternoon.

In addition, given the projections for the ageing population over the years up to 2000 in the Doncaster health authority area, and indeed South Yorkshire as a whole, in the hon. Gentleman's judgment as, indeed, in mine, there must be adequate provision in future for the care of the elderly. His point was that a decision now could prejudice the ability of the health authority to continue to meet that demand. I carefully noted his point and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, when we come to consider the representations in the case, we will bear that in mind.

I shall refer briefly to some of the services that Doncaster health authority provides and seek to answer the points made by the hon. Gentleman. I am glad to say that Doncaster health authority has benefited considerably from an expansion of resources. To take this year as an example, the health authority has an initial cash allocation of £61,589,000, which represents a real terms increase of 2·8 per cent. over last year—the third highest in the Trent region. That will bring Doncaster to a funding level of 96 per cent. of its RAWP target. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point that, historically, Doncaster has been relatively under-funded. In recent years progress has been made, but the RAWP target has not yet been achieved.

Mr. Redmond: I believe that the RAWP has gone by the wayside. Doncaster has a cash problem and it is tearing at the services provided for its people. It is no good having new facilities if we do not have sufficient staff to maintain present levels of service. When considering the long-term needs of Doncaster it is important to consider the horrific figures I have given. I can substantiate those figures and if the Minister wants a meeting some time before he makes his decision I will provide the evidence.

Mr. Freeman: I would be glad to meet the hon. Gentleman at his convenience to go over the figures. He is right that, in two years' time, RAWP will disappear and that we shall move to a system of weighted capitation funding of the regions and in turn, the districts. That funding will reflect not only the total number of patients within a district health authority, but relative mobility and the relative cost of providing services. I will be glad to pursue this particular matter with the hon. Gentleman in due course.

The Doncaster health authority is using the injection of funds to develop and improve many of its services and facilities. The most notable recent example is the newly opened children's unit at the Doncaster royal infirmary. The unit is providing four new wards plus new out-patient and child assessment facilities at a total cost of about £3½ million. It means children's facilities at Doncaster have now been brought together on a single site.

The hon. Gentleman has said that three wards are open now, but one is not and that an appeal has been launched to raise sufficient funds to open it. The health authority had planned to open the fourth ward in 1991. Clearly if one is building facilities it is much easier to build four rather than three, even if the intention is to bring the fourth ward on stream in a number of years' time.

I understand that the health authority's formal plan was to bring the fourth ward on stream in two years' time. There is full revenue funding in the budget for that. The health authority then decided to launch an appeal to

accelerate the opening of the fourth ward. That appeal has been remarkably successful and that is a tribute to the great generosity of the people of Doncaster. I hope that the health authority will be able to open the fourth ward earlier than expected. That decision will enable the health authority to do other things that would not otherwise be possible as the commissioning costs for the fourth ward, which are funded at present from 1991, will no longer be needed. I have already said that the revenue implications of opening the fourth ward from 1991 have already been taken into account in the budget.

Mr. Redmond: Doncaster health authority launched a cash appeal to provide staff for the children's ward. That is the first time in its history that the health authority has gone out to ask for money to staff a hospital or a ward. Previous cash appeals have gone for the cream on the cake —to provide televisions or to ensure that other patient needs are met. Never before has an appeal been launched to meet staffing needs.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The purpose of the appeal is to bring forward the opening of the fourth ward by two years, and to provide the capital and commissioning costs and revenue costs for the staff for those two years, but not beyond 1991. I do not believe that there is any dispute between us about the facts.

Doncaster health authority decided on such action because it had seen the tremendous success of the Great Ormond Street "Wishing Well" appeal. I am sorry that some people think that the appeal is for the entire unit, or that it is a reflection on the health authority's determination to provide good children's care. It was launched for the best of motives. Observing the nation's generosity in the "Wishing Well" appeal, the authority saw a chance to accelerate the opening of the fourth ward.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in complimenting the authority on the "Putting People First" initiative, launched in, I believe, 1984 as part of a regional campaign. I think that all parties in the House, whatever their disagreements about certain elements in our proposed NHS reforms, would agree with the excellent pamphlet provided by Doncaster health authority. I shall study the photographs with great interest. Patients in all hospitals, including Fullerton, should be treated as individuals. All members of staff, whether doctors, nurses or support staff, should treat people sympathetically and sensitively as individuals.

This has been a useful debate. I repeat the assurance that I gave the hon. Gentleman earlier: we shall give careful consideration to the proposal when it arrives next week following the objections of the Doncaster health council. I also assure him that I shall be happy to meet him to discuss the wider issue of resource funding for the Doncaster health authority.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 24 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Road Pricing

1. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of road pricing.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): Road pricing is often suggested as a way of using road space more efficiently in urban areas. It has some attractions, and I do not wish to rule it out for the future, but there are some serious practical problems, and it clearly could not be an immediate option.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that no remotely economic way of road pricing has yet been demonstrated anywhere in the world and that the chances of this wild idea becoming a reality remain very small?

Mr. Channon: I agree that there is nowhere on a comparable, or even approaching comparable scale to London—in respect of which road pricing is often mentioned—where anything is in place. The problems of congestion, for example, are much in the minds of all hon. Members. The issue needs careful study but, as I have said, road pricing could not be an immediate option. There are serious practical problems associated with it.

Mr. Roy Hughes: As the Treasury will collect approximately £17 billion in motor taxation during the current year and as less than one quarter of it will be spent on roads and maintenance, is it not diabolical that the Government should even consider imposing additional taxation on the motorist?

Mr. Channon: I do not think that I accept the hon. Member's figures in their entirety, but his general point is well taken. Motorists pay a great deal in taxation. It is a bit early for the hon. Gentleman to say that we are being diabolical because, as I said a few moments ago, road pricing could not be an immediate option. There are serious practical problems with it, and nothing could be done without a great deal of study. It is a bit too early to accuse us of all these appalling crimes.

Mr. Dickens *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dickens: It is nice to be back. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have, somehow, to lower the density of traffic in our city centres? Taxation as a way forward would enable buses and taxis to move faster through our city centres and give people more of a chance to get about.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must encourage more private investment so that we can accelerate our major road building programme in return for, perhaps, a toll which would enable motorists and other road users to save many pounds in petrol?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend raises several important matters. There are other questions on the Order Paper on which the subject of road expenditure may crop up. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government propose to publish a roads White Paper in the not too distant future. I shall bear what my hon. Friend has said in mind.

I share my hon. Friend's concern to reduce inner-city congestion. Whether road pricing is the right way to go about it remains doubtful. The matter needs careful study. I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House—this is clearly not a party political issue—to bear in mind the experiences of other towns and the arguments that have been advanced in favour of the proposal.

Local Authority Operations (Buy-outs)

2. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretry of State for Transport if, when considering proposals for privatising local authority transport operations, he will give full consideration to the desires of employees to participate in buy-outs.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): Yes. When a company is sold by competitive tender, we encourage the vendor to give the employees a reasonable opportunity to acquire a controlling interest, and we have been prepared to consider some sales by single tender to employees.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend knows that Nottingham City Transport was the largest municipal undertaking which was affected by the Transport Act 1985. Is he aware that that undertaking has confounded the prophets of doom as it is now a successful company which pays a dividend to its owners in the city rather than one which milks the ratepayer? The staff and employees of that undertaking want to share in the success. Above all, they want to secure their future. They are concerned about the future and they want to buy a stake in the business that employs them. What help and advice can my hon. Friend offer?

Mr. Portillo: I am very pleased with the success of the company and that the prophets of doom have been confounded. I see no reason why local authorities should want to own bus companies. I suggest that the staff should try to persuade the local authority to prepare a proposal for privatisation which includes employee participation.

Mr. Snape: Has the Minister seen the report on the future of West Midlands Travel, prepared by Peat Marwick McLintock? Does he agree with its conclusion that the breakup of West Midlands Travel would be generally disadvantageous to the travelling public?

Mr. Portillo: I have not seen the report, although I am aware of the seminar on the subject that was organised last

week. We have sent a proposal to the passenger transport authorities requesting their response to a suggestion that the companies might be split. I look forward to reading their responses and shall consider them carefully.

Mr. Favell: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority, having decentralised the operation of Greater Manchester Buses at the time of decentralisation, is now recentralising it, not for the sake of efficiency, but to make it more difficult for employees to indulge in buy-outs? Is he aware that there have been great successes? For example, the southern division has taken on enormous competition from the private sector, yet it is carrying more passengers than ever before? Is he aware that the engineering division will have to sack people because it has been forbidden to carry out private sector work?

Mr. Portillo: I am distressed at what my hon. Friend tells me. Greater Manchester is in very much the same position as West Midlands Travel in that a proposal letter has been sent by my Department and we are now receiving responses from the PTA and Greater Manchester Buses about the suggestion that there might be a splitting of the company. We shall consider their responses very carefully.

BR (Heathrow and Gatwick)

3. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the condition of stations and rolling stock where British Rail serves passengers arriving at Heathrow and Gatwick.

Mr. Portillo: The upkeep of particular stations and rolling stock is a management matter for British Rail. I am sure that it is aware of the commercial advantages of providing high-quality services from airports.

Mr. Speller: Is my hon. Friend aware that British Rail does not seem concerned about other circumstances? For example, Gatwick is the darkest, greyest of stations to welcome people, yet it provides an excellent service. At Heathrow, London Underground is intolerable in every way, and the route to the south-west is via Reading station, which is always dirty, where there are no seats, the buffets are awful and there are no porters, as on most of our stations. Does my hon. Friend agree that if British Rail is to survive as an economic entity it must do something about putting passengers as well as patients first?

Mr. Portillo: I am very disturbed by what my hon. Friend says, particularly about Reading, because I understand that £20 million has been spent on the modernisation of Reading station. However, I know that the management takes these matters seriously and I shall certainly draw my hon. Friend's remarks to their attention.

Mr. Gregory: When my hon. Friend next meets the chairman of British Rail, bearing in mind that tourism is Britain's fastest growing industry, will he discuss with him the possibility of an incentive scheme for his staff, as tourists to this great country expect at major stations such as Gatwick the services of a porter and the ability to understand which train leaves any particular platform? Those facilities are almost non-existent, as are the trollies at Gatwick and at Victoria. That is a national scandal.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend makes a series of interesting points, not least that the way in which British Rail is judged depends on the performance of every individual member of staff as that is its point of contact with passengers. I know that British Rail is most concerned to improve the standard and quality of the service that it provides to its customers. The shortage of trollies is partly a matter of passenger behaviour, and unfortunately many trollies go astray.

London Transport (Overcrowding)

4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to avoid overcrowding on London buses, trains and London Underground; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The only long-term cure for overcrowding is to increase capital investment in public transport. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that investment on London railways is now at record levels, and that London Regional Transport alone will be investing well over £1 million a day in London's transport systems.

Mr. Greenway: I welcome my right hon. Friend's assurance that investment is at record levels. However, is he aware that on London's bus, train and Underground services at most hours of the day and night people cannot move because they are so overcrowded? Is he further aware that it is predicted that within a short time surface traffic will come to a standstill if nothing is done and we will be unable to move either above or below ground? Will he initiate new underground lines and more trains and will he get rid of one-man operated buses and bus lanes and do everything that he can to get London's traffic moving?

Mr. Channon: I cannot agree with everything that my hon. Friend said. However, I agree with him entirely about the need to improve London's rail services, whether Underground or Network SouthEast. He will be pleased to learn that Underground investment is now about twice as high in real terms as it was in 1984-85, the last year of the Greater London council. I am sure that he will also be pleased to learn of the enormous investment in Network SouthEast since 1983—some 16 major schemes together worth over £500 million—and there is much more investment to come. The central London rail study and the east London rail study, about which my hon. Friend will know, show that much more improvement is necessary in London, which the Government are prepared to make.

Mr. Spearing: Is the Secretary of State aware that London Transport has confirmed to me that there are fewer trains running in peak hours on some Underground lines than there were 50 years ago and in the early 1950s? Is he aware that there are fewer trains arriving at Westminster on the District and Circle lines than there were 50 years ago, to the disadvantage of people living in places such as West Ham and Plaistow? Does he agree that, as a matter of urgency, some of the investment of which he speaks should be spent on restoring the signalling arrangements that used to be available for those trains so that more trains can be run on existing lines?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that recent investment approvals include the provision of extra trains and the Central line modernisation, which is running at over £700 million. It is an enormous scheme.

They also include the reconstruction of Angel station, enlarged ticket halls and escalators at Liverpool street, new ticket halls at Tower Hill and a massive expansion of investment in London Underground all over London.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is an urgent need for more and longer trains and for new lines on the overground such as the opening to commuter services on the west London line, and on the Underground such as the long overdue link to Clapham junction?

Mr. Channon: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a need for investment. He pointed out the need for investment on the Underground and I know of his constituency problems about that. I have described that investment to the House. There is also a need for investment in Network SouthEast. My hon. Friend will be pleased to learn—I am sure that he knows already—that over £2 billion of investment on electrification, signalling and rolling stock has taken place on British Rail in the past few years. I have recently approved another £60 million, or thereabouts, for Network SouthEast, new rolling stock for the Chiltern line, and the Cambridge-King's Lynn electrification. We also have large British Rail renewal programmes which are likely to increase.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Secretary of State aware that the biggest complaint on transport matters that hon. Members on both sides of the House hear arises from the installation of the ludicrous ticket barriers throughout the Underground system, which is giving rise to a great deal of congestion on the stations? Is the Secretary of State interested in the fact that I intend to introduce a Social Crimes (People's Tribunal) Bill soon and that when I have arraigned before the people's tribunal the idiots who got rid of trams and trolley buses, I shall then try to arraign those who introduced the ludicrous and unacceptable ticket barriers? If the Secretary of State does not want to appear before the people's tribunal, will he ensure that London Transport gets rid of those barriers because no one wants them?

Mr. Channon: It is particularly appropriate, 200 years after the French revolution, that the hon. Gentleman should start to be the Robespierre of London by introducing people's tribunals. It is typical of him.

On his serious point about the safety of the Underground ticket system, he will know that we are expecting a consultants' report and the House will be interested to have that.

Mr. Stanbrook: Whatever steps my right hon. Friend takes, will he please not deregulate London taxis or license mini cabs to ply for hire because if he does so, he will destroy one of London's biggest assets?

Mr. Channon: I take note of what my hon. Friend says. We have no plans to license mini cabs in the way that my hon. Friend describes. I note the strong views of hon. Members about taxis, which we shall consider carefully.

Ms. Ruddock: The Secretary of State has spoken mainly of trains, but as improving the railway network will take much time and as a substantial bus programme could be implemented quickly, will he instruct London Buses to put on the road the 30 Routemasters that are roadworthy but sitting unused in garages? Will he support proposals to strengthen bus lane rules to prevent lanes being clogged by cars? Will he instruct the traffic control support unit to step up its programme of bus priority at traffic signals, which is enormously beneficial and could be implemented within six months?

Mr. Channon: I am not sure that I agree with all the hon. Lady's remarks. There is considerable controversy about bus lanes; many hon. Members believe that in parts of London they have been put in the wrong places. I shall consider what the hon. Lady said about that. She will be pleased to learn that bus miles have increased significantly and that a further increase of 5 per cent. is planned for this year. Reliability is improved and we shall have more high-frequency mini bus services. Tendering has much improved bus services in London, and I shall welcome her support for all those measures.

Mr. Molyneaux: Can the Secretary of State do anything to persuade London Transport to open the Piccadilly line at Gloucester Road? Many travelling interests, especially those using Heathrow airport, wrote to London Transport about the problem as far back as a month ago. Fairclough, the main contractor, is showing no sign of urgency. Is it not deplorable that visitors from overseas arriving at Heathrow are treated to such a demonstration of incompetence?

Mr. Channon: I shall certainly look into what the right hon. Gentleman says. The right hon. Gentleman's remarks show that there are bound to be short-term problems while a large investment programme is going on. I shall consider specifically the point that he brings to my attention and write to him about it.

Dartford Crossing

5. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Dartford crossing will be opened to the public.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Peter Bottomley): Good progress is being made on the new bridge between Dartford and Thurrock, which is due to open early in 1991.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend would probably like to know that the people of north-west Kent are looking forward with considerable enthusiasm to their deliverance from the current heavy traffic james of one or more miles every day north and south waiting pass through the Dartford tunnel. Will he give details of the steps that are being taken to ensure that approch roads to the Dartford bridge will be adequate?

Mr. Bottomley: Approach roads to the bridge at Dartford and Thurrock will be increased to four lanes, the A13 southwards and A2 northwards.

Mr. Dunn: Is my hon. Friend aware that his announcement is most welcome? None the less, there are serious problems combining a need to improve the infrastructure and roads leading to the tunnel and the opening date, bearing in mind that every day the people of Dartford experience serious congestion problems? The fact that we can move forward to the opening will resolve that problem in part. I welcome what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Bottomley: It is important to get the necessary infrastructure in place so that the economy can continue to

develop and so that places that need special relief from congestion and extra jobs can benefit from investment, such as in this case, from the private sector.

Severn Crossing

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if a date for the commencement of the construction of the second Seven crossing has yet been decided.

Mr. Bottomley: The timing depends on the proposals that we shall receive later this year from tenderers, and on approval of the necessary legislation by Parliament.

Mr. Hughes: Is the Minister aware that the Secretary of State for Wales has said that the second crossing will be in place by 1995, whereas his colleague the Minister of State, Welsh Office recently told the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs that there is no guarantee that the second crossing will be in place by the year 2000. Given that our governor-general, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), does not have the ear of the Prime Minister, who is telling the truth?

Mr. Bottomley: If I were concerned, I would say that it would be difficult to have an extra crossing before 1995, even on the best of assumptions. The hon. Gentleman and many others on both sides of the Severn will be interested to know that we hope to invite tenders in the next week or two. The date of construction of the bridge will depend on the result of those tenders. We are moving forward and that should unite hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is glad that he asked that question.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that a second Severn crossing will substantially increase traffic on the M4 as more and more constituents of the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) travel towards London? Will my hon. Friend therefore look, in conjunction with those proposals, at improvements to the road network nearer London between Maidenhead and the end of the M4 to ensure that the hon. Member for Newport, East is not back here in a few years demanding further improvements so that his constituents and mine can get to central London on the M4?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes. Perhaps the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) will have to talk to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who seems on occasion to have different views. It is worth remembering that the English Stones site was chosen for the second bridge because about 60 per cent. of the traffic coming across the Severn from Wales head south rather than towards London.

Mr. Wigley: Given the comments by the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), will the Minister assure the House that his Department and the Welsh Office co-ordinate closely on this matter? Will the hon. Gentleman assure the House that as the scheme goes ahead there will be co-ordination in terms of the spin-off requirements and planning of employment opportunities so that there are opportunities on both sides of the channel for work on the scheme?

Mr. Bottomley: Those job opportunities are coming and that is generating the extra traffic. Better infrastructure means more economic growth and more economic growth means more traffic—they go together in a cycle.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the hon. Member for Newport, East. I suspect that my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Wales get on better than the hon. Gentleman gets on with either of them.

Mr. Prescott: Does the Minister's Department fully agree with the Secretary of State for Wales, who says that there is inadequate expenditure on our transport infrastructure and that 35 of the 51 programmes decided for 1985 have been delayed? Will the White Paper review the situation, especially the iniquitous toll system that the Department intends imposing on traffic over the Severn estuary?

Mr. Bottomley: Is that not very interesting? Suppose we ran a sweepstake on which party introduced tolls on the Severn bridge? The Labour party was responsible. The hon. Gentleman turns away in Opposition from what he supported in Government.

M40

7. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of work on the completion of the M40.

16. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the M40 extension to be completed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Construction of the motorway north of Wendlebury, remains on target for completion by the end of 1990.

We are inviting tenders for the section south of Wendlebury today.

Subject to the outcome and to the satisfactory completion of the remaining statutory procedures we hope to start construction this summer for completion as early as possible.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Does the Minister appreciate that everyone in the Oxford area remains deeply concerned at the prospect of chaos on local roads due to the mishandling of this matter by his Department? Will he confirm that, even on that timetable, there will be a period of eight to 12 months when an additional 9,000 vehicles a day will be piled on to the existing congested local roads? What additional financial support will the Government provide the local highway authority so that it can provide at least some protection to local pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and motorists from that chaos? Local resident in Headington, Risinghurst and north Oxford deserve better treatment than the Minister is giving them.

Mr. Bottomley: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been listening during the past two or three weeks. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that he wanted all the stops pulled out, and issued similar clear instructions, to ensure that the gap was as short as possible, not as long as possible. *[Interruption.]* If the period which I have announced today is still too long, the hon. Gentleman really has trouble.

We are all aware that the Pear tree roundabout has some of the longest weekend traffic jams in southern England. We know that we must try to accelerate the procedures. We need to pay attention to people's democratic right to object and accept their right to speak before an independent impartial inspector—that may be news to the hon. Gentleman. We want to ensure that local people decide whether they want roads. In the areas in which they want to put up with the casualties, environmental confusion and lack of jobs, they can go on objecting. In Oxfordshire, people are glad that my right hon. Friend has decided that this road should be completed and we now have the chance of closing the gap, rather than expanding it.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that since the completion of the M25, traffic on the M40 has increased considerably and, with it, the noise that local residents have to put up with? Does he agree that when the motorway is completed all the way to Birmingham, there will be a further substantial increase in traffic, especially in heavy goods vehicles? Will my hon. Friend come along to Gerrards Cross and discuss with the residents the problems of noise, or could we come to the Department to discuss what we are going to do about it?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Minister ensure that all future specifications for new roads more than meet the volume and traffic flows——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a bit wide of the M40.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Minister ensure that the next extension more than meets the specifications made for the previous section and will he ensure that the delays and traffic hold-ups are cut to the minimum?

Mr. Bottomley: We will do the best we can. My right hon. Friend has said that he wants to end the inter-urban congestion. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are building the M40 as dual three-lane, which will help the traffic north of the west midlands as well as the west midlands itself. There is a problem for the Opposition. If the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is properly reported, he seems to be against the building of roads this week.

Sir John Stokes: Is my hon. Friend aware that I have lived by the M40 since it first started? As the route progressed, I moved further out, but the motorway always caught me up. Now the wrong route has been chosen and the butterflies have been preferred to local residents. Can we please clear up the mess as soon as possible?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir. However, as my hon. Friend will have noticed, our leader has instructed us to be environmentalists and is leading us in the right way.

Traffic Congestion

8. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been undertaken by his Department as to the likely annual cost to industry of traffic congestion on Britain's roads.

Mr. Channon: The costs of road congestion are clearly substantial, although there are no reliable estimates of the total costs.

Mr. Cran: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that the industrial community has estimated that traffic congestion in this country is costing British industry about £6,000 million per annum, which illustrates how difficult it is for companies in the north of England and which are trying to export. Against that background, does my right hon. Friend agree that one solution is an accelerated construction programme, but that another is a review of planning methods, which seem to allow a minority to hold up infrastructure expenditure for far too long?

Mr. Channon: On the first point, it is right to review the roads programme which, as my hon. Friend knows, is done every two years. We will come forward with proposals in the next few months. I hope that they will be to his satisfaction and to the satisfaction of most other hon. Members. On planning permission, there is a difficult balance between allowing people to have their democratic rights and not having unreasonable delays. Rather than concentrate so much on planning delays, I have been concentrating on the internal procedures, which take a considerable time—and have done for many years—before a road reaches the planning inquiry stage. I have identified ways of cutting that time by a considerable margin and I look forward to roads being built far more quickly than in the past.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Is it not gross complacency for the Secretary of State to base his projections on what he himself says are unreliable statistics, especially against the background of looking forward to the 1992 European market? Is it not extremely important for our industrialists in all areas of the United Kingdom to ensure that they have adequate communications and to ensure that export-led industries are not disadvantaged? His own proposals pale into insignificance when we consider the projects being undertaken at present by the French Government.

Mr. Channon: It is a bit early for the hon. Lady to accuse me of complacency. I have already announced that we shall have a roads review and a programme announcement in the next few months and when the hon. Lady has studied that, she will be in a position to decide whether she thinks it is adequate. I strongly agree with her that it is in the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom that we should have a decent roads programme so that people can get their goods from the United Kingdom to the continent—[HON. MEMBERS: "And railways."] We must also improve the railways, but the hon. railways, but the hon. Lady's question concerned roads, and I agree with the thrust of her comments.

Mr. Adley: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that it is not his opinion that the only way of dealing with congestion on the roads is to build yet more roads?

Mr. Channon: It is not my only way of dealing with congestion on the roads. I am extremely anxious—as, I know, is my hon. Friend—that the advent of the Channel tunnel should lead to a substantial increase in the amount of freight carried by British Rail. I look forward to British Rail's report and its proposals for achieving that north of London. We shall receive that report some time this year. I am certain that, if British Rail handles the matter correctly—as it must and will—substantial opportunities

will be created for businesses in the north and elsewhere to send their goods economically and, above all, reliably, to the continent. That will benefit both BR and the road user.

Mr. Prescott: Does the Secretary of State agree with the Secretary of State for Wales that there is insufficient expenditure on our roads infrastructure, and does he agree with the CBI's estimate that insufficient expenditure is costing industry £15 billion? After 10 years of this Government will he now agree that average expenditure on roads in real terms has been higher under Labour than under the Conservative Government?

Mr. Channon: I certainly do not agree with the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I am surprised that he makes that boast. No doubt he was wrongly reported in the *Morning Star*, and that is very understandable——

Mr. Prescott: Do you read the *Morning Star*?

Mr. Channon: Yes, every morning, that is where I find the hon. Gentleman's most authoritative speeches. According to the *Morning Star*, he is against all this expenditure. I am glad to learn that that is not the case and that he is in favour of it. I agree that we must have an adequate road infrastructure to meet the challenges of 1992 and the turn of the century. I have not read the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to which the hon. Gentleman referred but I seldom, if ever, disagree with my right hon. Friend.

Trunk Roads (North-East)

10. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress in improving the trunk road systems in the north-east of England.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The A1 between Newcastle and Morpeth and the A69 between Newcastle and Hexham are now dual carriageway throughout.

Mr. Thompson: The Minister's disappointing reply will not go down well in the north-east of England. Will he consider instituting a full-scale survey of the A69 east-west and the A1 north-south as the Romans did 1,900 years ago?

Mr. Bottomley: We shall review the whole length of both stretches of road. I do not want to prejudge the conclusions.

Mr. Amos: Will my hon. Friend undertake to look again at traffic flows on the A69 west of Hexham, as there is clearly an urgent need to dual that road all the way to Carlisle?

Mr. Bottomley: A review of the traffic on that stretch of road does not suggest that a dual carriageway is justified, but we shall see what we can do by widening and providing overtaking stretches, which is just as important.

BR Property (Accidents)

11. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* deaths, *(b)* major injuries and *(c)* minor injuries there were in non-movement accidents during 1988 on British Rail property in Great Britain.

Mr. Portillo: Full railway accident statistics for 1988 will be published in the chief inspecting officer of railways' annual report later in the year. The information presently available shows 17 deaths, of which 14 were those of trespassers or suicides, 310 major injuries and 3,864 minor injuries.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for those figures. Is it not clear from the recent inquest on my constituent Paul Elvin, who died at Euston, that British Rail does not enforce the rules governing the employment of contractors on its premises and that it does not comply with the rules that require it to ensure, for example, that there are circuit breakers to turn off the mains cables if there is someone on the line? Will he guarantee that the railway inspectorate will prosecute where there is clear evidence of criminal failure by British Rail and others working on its property, as that has not happened often enough in the past?

Mr. Portillo: I am not familiar with the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, although I shall definitely look into it. These are matters for the Health and Safety Commission and the railway inspectorate. In the broadest terms, I can confirm that both those bodies have the power to prosecute when it seems appropriate to do so.

Road Assessment Studies (London)

13. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of road assessment studies for London now under consideration by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None. Consultants have been engaged to carry out assessment studies in four parts of the capital with very severe transport-related problems. They are currently assessing and testing a wide range of options which contain some road elements. Their reports are expected later this summer. We have also commissioned a study of the area around Heathrow and south-west London.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware that, whatever he may say, there is growing concern among constituents in many parts of London about the potential development of major "road improvements" in their area because they will not be improvements of the environment in which many of our constituents live; they will be problems? Will he give an assurance that, before there is any major road development in London, if local residents call for a public inquiry, he will support it?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes. I go further than that and invite the hon. Gentleman to go to the Rochester Way relief road, which was the last road built in inner London and started by the GLC under the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and supported by a Labour council. The hon. Gentleman will see the environmental relief, the casualty reduction, and the opportunity for more jobs. I wish that the hon. Gentleman and others would spend as much time being concerned about the nearly 500 people who die every year on London's roads —the equivalent of a Sheffield Hillsborough every 10 weeks—and the thousands of people in London who are injured on our roads. Those issues need to be tackled with public transport and some road changes as well.

THE ARTS

Arts Council

64. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Arts Council; and what was discussed.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): I met Lord Rees-Mogg on 21 March and we discussed a number of matters of mutual interest. I shall be meeting Mr. Palumbo in his capacity as the new chairman of the Arts Council shortly.

Mr. Knapman: I join my right hon. Friend in thanking Lord Rees-Mogg for his seven years of dedicated work for the Arts Council and welcoming Mr. Palumbo, who has some important but difficult decisions to make. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the principle of arm's length funding for the arts will continue?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his tribute to Lord Rees-Mogg for his outstanding seven years as chairman of the Arts Council and for wishing Mr. Palumbo every success in his new task. I strongly reaffirm that we shall continue to allocate funds within a given total to the Arts Council and that the arm's length principle will continue.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Will the Minister point out that, according to the Government publication, *British Business*, nearly £4 billion comes from the arts and overseas earnings, and that £1·5 billion of that is from cultural tourism? Will he point out, further, that it makes economic good sense to continue subsidies at a much higher level and that is he aware that that article in a Government publication should prompt him to press the Treasury and the Government for more money for the arts?

Mr. Luce: The right hon. Gentleman is right to point out the important contribution which the arts make to the economy. Those findings emerged principally from the Policy Studies Institute, which partly funded that study. The arts world is expanding successfully with many new audiences, not just with taxpayers' money but joint partnerships in which the private sector is playing a leading role.

Mr Goodlad: Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the chairman of the Arts Council the funding of the royal national theatre? Is he aware that, despite greatly increased subventions to the Arts Council, funding for the royal national theatre has seriously fallen behind the rate of inflation and that that is a serious threat to the artistic standards of one of our greatest institutions? Will he consider direct funding by his Department along the lines of that for the British Museum?

Mr. Luce: On the latter point, I must make it plain that I wish to continue the arm's length policy. It is not right that civil servants and Ministers in Whitehall should take specific decisions on the allocation of funds to the arts. It must be for the Arts Council and regional arts associations to do that.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the value of the royal national theatre, and I am grateful to him for doing that. Last year 10 per cent. extra funds were given to the Arts Council, and part of that was through incentive funding and extra money for tourism. In both cases, the royal national theatre stands to gain.

Mr. Tony Banks: When the Minister next meets Mr. Palumbo will he discuss with him the enormous cultural contribution that is made by the British Broadcasting Corporation? At the moment, that cultural contribution to this country is being jeopardised by the Government's White Paper proposals on broadcasting and the hypocritical, provocative action of top management of giving themselves a 30 per cent. pay hike, while offering BBC workers a pay cut. Will he comment on that?

Mr. Luce: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his temporary role as Opposition Front Bench spokesman on arts. However, he has not done his research because broadcasting is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. There is no doubt that broadcasting will play a key role in the arts. Under the White Paper and the proposed reforms, it has an even bigger role to play, with a wider range of choice.

Mr. Holt: Does my right hon. Friend accept that while he must not necessarily give directions in the allocation of funds, he might give a hint that when the Arts Council is giving money to American sculptors to produce a tipsy bottle as a memento of Captain Cook's discovery of Australia, he might bring some pressure to bear and not agree with the outgoing chairman that that was perfectly appropriate spending of British money?

Mr. Luce: It is for the Arts Council to judge and for hon. Members to express their views if they like or dislike a particular form of support. However, this gives me an opportunity to say that the most important role of the Arts Council—the expenditure of money—is to strengthen the standards of excellence in the arts. That must be a priority both in London and outside and I am glad that Mr. Palumbo stressed the importance of that in his opening remarks when he first came to the Arts Council.

Greater London Arts Association

65. **Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Greater London Arts Association to discuss the structure of arts administration in London.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairman of the Greater London Arts Association from time to time. A variety of matters is discussed.

Mr. Smith: Will the Minister ensure that as the Wilding inquiry into the structure of arts administration in London and elsewhere gets under way, part of Mr. Wilding's consideration will relate to the threat from property development to many arts enterprises and organisations in inner London? Will he do so particularly in the light of current pressures in the Tottenham Court road area where an actors' agency, two theatre groups, two film production agencies and the Directors Guild are all threatened by development proposals currently under appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment? Will he ensure that those issues involving a major threat to the life of valuable arts institutions in inner London will form part of Mr. Wilding's inquiry?

Mr. Luce: I take note of the hon. Gentleman's comments and I will look into it. However, I am not convinced that that is necessarily part of Mr. Wilding's terms of reference for his review, which is to look at the relationship between the allocation of money from central Government to the Arts Council and in turn to the regional arts associations, the coherence of funding for the arts and to improve the structural procedures for the disbursement of arts money.

Mr. Harry Greenway: When my right hon. Friend next meets the director of the Greater London Arts Association, will he express robust support for the new lady director of the Victoria and Albert museum in her efforts to restructure staffing at the museum in the interests of the museum and its visitors?

Mr. Luce: I recently had the opportunity last Monday to visit the Victoria and Albert museum. I am full of of admiration for the work carried out by the director, the staff, curators and administrators.

Orchestras (Rehearsal Funds)

66. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had with the Arts Council on the allocation of funds for the rehearsal of contemporary British music by the London orchestras.

Mr. Luce: The allocation of funds to the London orchestras is a matter for the Arts Council. While I do not seek to influence the council's artistic judgments, I fully support its policy of encouraging artistic excellence, including the performance of well-rehearsed contemporary music.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Minister aware that while it is sometimes relatively straightforward to obtain sponsorship money for the first performances of contemporary British music, it is more difficult to keep that music in the repertory? If that music is to enjoy success, it needs additional assistance. While recognising that that is primarily a matter for the Arts Council, will he at least undertake to consider discussing the matter?

Mr. Luce: That really is the reason for the answer that I have just given. Of course it is true that much sponsorship goes to the traditional arts, although there is increasing evidence that sponsorship is going towards innovative or experimental arts. That is one reason why the Arts Council has decided to use taxpayers' money to encourage the four London orchestras which play some contemporary music.

Dance

67. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what steps he is taking to encourage dance.

Mr. Luce: As with all art forms, I look to the Arts Council for advice about the development of dance. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Arts Council is currently considering a wide-ranging report about the future of dance.

Mr. Bowis: Will my right hon. Friend take a brisk two-step, first to the Arts Council to discuss with it the criteria by which it allocates money for the arts, and to express the concern of this House that there might be some risk of the council not including a solution to funding for the Northern Ballet? Will he then take a brisk step on to the chairman of British Rail and discuss with him his recent statements that he may be considering withdrawing the entertainment express contract, which, of course, gives great support to touring companies, including dance companies?

Mr. Luce: On my hon. Friend's latter point, I note the concern that has been expressed by many people in the arts world. I have been in touch with the chairman of British Rail to draw his attention to the widespread anxiety about that matters and I hope that he will take these views into account.

As to dance policy, the Arts Council is considering the independent report. My hon. Friend drew attention to the Northern Ballet. There was a very impressive Adjournment debate in this House, which was widely attended. I took the chance to convey to the chairman of the Arts Council the strong views of the House, and I know that he will take those views into account.

Mr. Flannery: Did the Minister discuss with the chairman of the Arts Council the details of the Northern Ballet, Manchester, which tours more than any other company, and for which there is very deep affection throughout the north, and, indeed, in a much wider area, so that its continuance can be assured?

Mr. Luce: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have drawn very strongly to the attention of the chairman of the Arts Council the views of this House, which have been widely expressed, about the value of the Northern Ballet. It is, of course, for the council to make the decision. I should point out that it is not a final decision, that this is just one of a number of options that have been put forward in an independent report, which the council will have to consider shortly.

CIVIL SERVICE

Trade Unions

89. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met leaders of the Civil Service trades unions; and what matters were discussed.

92. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the Civil Service trade unions; and what subjects were discussed.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Richard Luce): I have meetings from time to time with representatives of Civil Service trade unions, both centrally and during visits to Civil Service establishments. A wide variety of matters is raised.

Mr. Favell: Has my right hon. Friend had any discussions with leaders of trade unions about regional pay? Does he agree with me that earnings in the private sector vary widely from region to region, and that similar market conditions ought to prevail in the Civil Service? Does he agree that the fact that there is not regional pay is one of the greatest obstructions when it comes to Civil Service Departments moving to regions of high unemployment?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend must be right to draw attention to the importance of flexibility in pay in order to

cater for the problems of recruitment and retention in different areas—different in terms of skills, or geographically. In fact, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced very recently that the maximum rate of the London pay addition will be increased to £1,000 per annum. Of course, the rates have to be negotiated. I understand that at the moment they apply to 50,000 civil servants. The recruitment and retention problems of particular areas have to be taken into account, but a degree of flexibility is now developing.

Mr. Barnes: Has the Minister discussed a 10-point code of ethics for press officers with the Institution of Professional Civil Servants, whose members are opposed to becoming political hacks? Should a Government who claim to support individualism be operating a Ministry of Propaganda from 10 Downing street?

Mr. Luce: On the question of Government publicity, there are very clearly laid down procedures. The hon. Gentleman referred to a code of ethics. I do not know whether he was referring to individual civil servants or to the question of publicity as a whole. If he was referring to individual civil servants, I would point out that in December 1987 very clear guidelines were laid down as to what steps individual civil servants may take if they have grievances.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the Civil Service unions the essential importance of honesty among public servants? Will he warn them of the long-term consequences of breaches of confidence concerning documents in their possession, and of the effect of such breaches on democracy and democratic control as a whole?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend must be right to draw attention to this matter, which is of concern. It is only a tiny minority of civil servants who are doing a grave disservice to the rest of the Civil Service which provides an outstanding service to the elected Government of the day and will continue to so do.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister advise civil servants what they should do if they form the view that their ministerial head would not mind if they leaked certain correspondence, such as letters from the Solicitor-General?

Mr. Luce: The position is absolutely clear. There are disciplinary procedures which the permanent secretary of the particular Department can take. If a civil servant disobeys the rules, disciplinary proceedings can be taken.

Mr. Boswell: Will my right hon. Friend take a fresh look at the possibility of introducing an entirely independent assessment of disputes in the limited number of cases, sometimes involving principle rather than large sums, where Ministers have been unable to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of hon. Members and their constituents?

Mr. Luce: I am not absolutely certain to what my hon. Friend is drawing attention, but if he can provide me with further information, I shall look into the matter.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister agree that in the past there was no need for a code of practice for information officers but that with the present incumbent of 10 Downing street the position is different? Does he agree that it is wrong of Mr. Bernard Ingham to tell the police who its director of public affairs should be and wrong of any Minister to ask any information officer to enter the political arena? Will he, therefore, pursue the establishment of an impartial and mutually agreed code of practice for information officers and ensure that there is no victimisation if it is invoked by any civil servant?

Mr. Luce: The procedures are clearly and carefully laid down and there are no difficulties with them. Each Department has a clear understanding of what they are. I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is worried about.

Civil Servants (Legal Qualifications)

91. **Mr. Rooker** To ask the Minister for the Civil service how many civil servants have a legal qualification.

Mr. Luce: There are about 2,500 lawyers in the Civil Service.

Mr. Rooker: As only two of those lawyers are allocated by the serious fraud office to deal with the House of Fraser-Lonrho affairs and as one of them advised against and was overruled only by the assistant director, Ms. Chase, could we have a few more Government lawyers put on this case so that at least they can begin to get round to interviewing the leading protagonists? Obviously, with only two on the job, they have not got round to doing that.

Mr. Luce: I have enough questions to answer in the House and I will not be drawn into answering on the Lonrho case. Although we have had some success in recruiting lawyers for the Government legal service and the Crown prosecution service, we are still short of a large number.

Recruitment

93. **Sir Hal Miller:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service whether he intends to change the procedures for recruitment into the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: In the light of current developments in Civil Service management, Departments will be free to carry out their own recruitment to all except the senior grades and their fast stream feeder entries, subject to rules laid down to safeguard the principle of selection on merit by fair and open competition. I announced these plans on 13 April 1989 in a written reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins).

Sir Hal Miller: While I am sure that the Departments would welcome the greater freedom and responsibility thus imposed on them by the Minister, how will he assure the rest of us that the quality of service, seniority and qualifications will be ensured so that throughout the country we may maintain the level of service and the morale of the Civil Service?

Mr. Luce: I hope that in general the concept of delegating more authority to individual Departments to carry out the bulk of their recruitment policies is the right one. They are in the best position to judge what recruits they need. Nevertheless, I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point about the need to maintain the highest standards. It will be up to the commission to recommend to the Minister for the Civil Service rules that should be followed by all

Departments relating to such matters as, for example, fair and open competition, selection on merit and the impartiality of the service.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that there are difficulties in appointing civil servants? I remember the Minister coming to the Dispatch Box and telling me that he had been to their annual conference. I asked him what the morale was like at that conference. It was not very good. That was because of the Government's massive cuts in local government. Why do the Government not back off and make the money available? Then we would get the right people for the jobs?

Mr. Luce: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman believes that I have responsibility for local government as well as for the Civil Service. I visit Civil Service offices around the country, so I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the vast bulk of the Civil Service is doing an outstanding job and its morale is good. It is a slimmed-down, highly professional and very impartial service.

Agencies

94. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many Civil Service agencies have now been announced; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: Five executive agencies have now been established following the launch last week of the National Weights and Measures and Warren Spring Laboratories. Around 30 more have been announced as candidates.

Mr. Watts: In thanking my right hon. Friend for that encouraging reply about progress so far, may I ask him to tell the House what other candidates are at present under active consideration, and when he will be in a position to make a further statement?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have undertaken to give regular reports to the House on the progress of Civil Service agencies. Within the next two or three months there should be statements about a number of other areas, including the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre, the Department of Social Security's resettlement units and the employment services. There may, of course, be others, too.

Mr. Charles Powell

95. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will arrange for Mr. Charles Powell to give a lecture at the Civil Service college.

Mr. Luce: There are no plans to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: How about a title such as, "'Recent' developments in Civil Service ethics, which allow a principal private secretary to the Prime Minister to authorise and to give approval to the unauthorised disclosure of a Law Officer's letter"? If that title is not good enough, how about, "The role of a principal private secretary to the Prime Minister in preserving the Prime Minister from a position of having misled the House of Commons and the consequences of misbehaviour"?

Mr. Luce: I am not sure how many times over the past three years that the hon. Gentleman and I have had exchanges across the Floor.

Mr. Dalyell: Seventeen.

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for providing me with that additional information. It feels like 17. The position is absolutely clear. We have made statements time and again in the House. I am glad to say that Mr. Powell, who served me in 1980 when I was Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with responsibility for Africa, is an outstanding civil servant.

Airport Security

3.32 pm

The following Question stood upon the Order Paper:

35. **Mr. David Evans** (Welwyn Hatfield): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent steps have been taken to help improve security at Britain's airports; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): Immediately after Lockerbie increased security measures were ordered for American airlines, particularly for hold baggage. Soon afterwards I decided to bring in further measures for them in relation to cabin baggage, hold baggage and cargo. On 6 April I announced a package of measures to provide better security of restricted areas and for aircraft, passengers and baggage in those areas.

I have now set firm objectives for a further tightening of security, particularly in relation to items that might be used to conceal explosive devices; the screening of all hold baggage, cargo, mail and courier, consignments; the physical separation of inbound and outbound passengers; and the design of aircraft interiors.

I intend to more than double the strength of my Department's aviation security division so that it can carry out more inspections and spot checks, as well as special surveys to determine whether new measures are needed. To emphasise its monitoring role, the team of aviation security advisers will be reconstituted as the aviation security inspectorate.

There are certain areas where my powers under the Aviation Security Act 1982 are more limited than I should like. I shall therefore seek new powers from Parliament to secure more effective implementation of security measures.

I am doubling the budget for the current financial year for research and development into equipment, to include the continuing examination of commercially available equipment and the development of new techniques for the detection of explosives.

We have now received the Federal Aviation Administration's proposal to install one of the first production thermal neutron analysis machines at Gatwick or Heathrow later this year. We have kept in touch with progress on a similar British project and we are discussing with its sponsors the possibility of funding further work.

With the United States of America we initiated an ambitious programme of work by the International Civil Aviation Organisation designed to improve security standards worldwide. I look forward to a further discussion with the United States Secretary of Transportation when he visits London later this week.

My written answer today to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) gives further details of my review of aviation security.

Mr. David Evans: I thank my right hon. Friend for those far-reaching initiatives, which I am sure the House will also welcome. Could he be more specific about what he means by his reference to tightening up the security services? In future, will airports be safer place to which to go? When will the initiatives be implemented?

Mr. Channon: The timing of the initiatives will vary. Some of those that I have announced this afternoon will take some time to implement, but my hon. Friend will know that I announced a package of measures on 6 April, some of which can take effect almost immediately.

The initiatives I have announced today are part of a continuing process. This is not the end and we shall continue to improve aviation security. I am now aiming for a set of internationally agreed rules on security procedures on, for example, radios and other electrical items. I am tightening up the requirements for screening hold baggage and the security requirements for cargo. I assure my hon. Friend that there is still more to be done, but I am determined to do anything within my power to improve security at airports.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Would not this question have been better answered by way of a statement? Will the new powers that the right hon. Gentleman is seeking from Parliament be sought in this Session because of their urgency? What will be his response to American pressures to impose their standards on our airports?

Mr. Channon: My answer today represents a progress report on the continuing review of security. I made some announcements on 6 April and I am always open to the House to make a statement, if that is what it would like. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) had a question down and it seemed right that I should answer it at the end of Question Time as his question was not reached earlier.

It is not for me to say exactly when the required legislation will come forward, but it will do so at the earliest convenient date. There is, however, already a heavy programme of legislation for the present Session of Parliament.

With regard to the United States Government, I am looking forward to discussing the relevant matters with the Secretary of Transportation during the next few days. We are in total agreement about the need to improve aviation security. If there are any differences, which I doubt, I am sure that they are small ones that can be resolved quickly.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is sensible to take a question at the end of Question Time occasionally when most people who are interested in a particular subject happen to be in the House? Can my right hon. Friend be more specific about the proposals he has in mind with regard to extending the 1982 Act? I welcome the doubling in the budget that my right hon. Friend has mentioned.

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. We worked off the questions today and, as my right hon. Friend has said, this is a time when most people interested in transport are likely to be here. I shall try to ensure that the aviation security inspectorate, which I have announced, will have adequate powers to ensure that aviation security requirements are properly implemented. I also want to consider whether there should be sanctions for lax security or powers over persons other than airports or airlines. At the moment the powers are limited to airports and airlines.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): When the Secretary of State meets Secretary Skinner for discussions, will he ask him about recent reports that show that just a few hours before the Lockerbie disaster the United States issued further warnings of immediate priority about possible hijacks or explosions on aircraft, which,

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

admittedly, Secretary Skinner's Department did not pass on to the British Government? Will he take up that matter with the United States Secretary of Transportation?

Mr. Channon: I shall examine what the hon. Gentleman has said. As to the general question of Lockerbie, the House will know that I made a full reply to a question put by the Leader of the Opposition on 21 March. At this stage I have nothing else to add.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on this package. Is he now satisfied with the arrangements for liasion between the British Airports Authority and his Department on security matters? Has he given any consideration to the establishment of a land border guard similar to that in Germany and other countries with specific control of airport security alone?

Mr. Channon: No, so far we have not considered that matter. Obviously we shall keep airport security under continuous review, and what my hon. Friend has suggested is an important subject which needs further study. At the moment however, I do not believe that it would be an appropriate procedure for the United Kingdom.

I am satisfied about liaison with BAA. Between us we must work to try to ensure improved airport security. The House must be under no illusions, however, of the great difficulties that always exist in this regard. At Heathrow, 50,000 people are employed and 100,000 people are employed at the four largest airports of the United Kingdom. I shall do my best, and so will my officers and all those concerned, to improve security at airports, but the House will be aware from the figures I have given what an enormous task it is.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the problems is the number of subcontractors, who have a rapid turnover of staff? As it is known that it takes at least three months to get a security clearance, is it not obvious that the rules applying to subcontractors working at major airports must be not only clearly laid out but rigidly enforced?

Mr. Channon: It could well be that the powers I seek to take in due course will cover the specific point which the hon. Lady has raised and about which she is quite correct. She has put her finger on an important problem.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): I revert to the matter of the discussions that my right hon. Friend is to have with the United States Secretary of Transportation. Has my right hon. Friend seen reports that the American authorities intend to seek to impose their standards of security on what, to them, are foreign airlines and foreign airports? As, by implication, that would mean an attempt by the United States to impose its rules on British airways at Heathrow and Gatwick, will the Secretary of State, in discussions with Secretary Skinner, make clear to him that such a proposal would not be acceptable and that the rules relating to British airports and airlines must remain firmly with the Department of Transport and other agencies in this country?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that point. I shall want to discuss this matter with Mr. Skinner, bearing in mind that the United Kingdom Government are responsible for aviation security in this country. I am sure that the object of the American initiative is to achieve better security in other countries, where, perhaps, Governments do not take their responsibility in this area as seriously as we do. I am sure that we will have no problem about this matter and that we will amicably conclude our discussions, because both Governments share a belief in the overriding need to improve security. We have worked extremely well together in Montreal at the International Civil Aviation Organisation, and I am sure that we will do so again on this occasion.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): How much new money will be spent on this package of proposals? Will it be greater or less than the £500 million doled out by the Prime Minister to save a dozen Tory-held Kent constituencies? Is this Government more concerned about looking after their interests in constituencies they hold than in saving lives?

Mr. Channon: The serious answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that, if there are security requirements that should be enforced on their merits, lack of finance will in no way be allowed to stand in the way.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I appreciate the importance of the figures to which the Secretary of State referred a few moments ago of the huge number of employees involved at airports, and I also recognise that the West German authorities and PanAm, to name just two groups involved, are trying to put the blame for what has happened on this country. However, will my right hon. Friend confirm that, when it comes to the security of aircraft and to the checking of baggage and tickets, the airlines are responsible and must be forced to carry out their duties properly?

Mr. Channon: It is extremely important that airlines carry out their duties properly. Being well aware of the fact, the airlines are energetically following this course. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that point. We are continually emphasising to airlines the great importance of the security measures they should undertake.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Can my righ hon. Friend assure us that the checks at airports to detect persons carrying explosives are as scrupulous as the checks made of persons entering the Palace of Westminster?

Mr. Channon: That is certainly what I intend should occur, and I hope that it will. It must be the rule that, if security staff are in any doubt about a radio, a cassette recorder or other item being carried, they should forbid its carriage.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I must protest that the Secretary of State has just given what was really a statement. In fact, he spends most of his time either avoiding making statements to the House or using Question Time to make points. As all hon. Members know, under the procedure for statements in this place, an hon. Member can obtain a copy of the statement and make a judgment about it.

The Secretary of State knows that, if what he said today in his statement improves security at airports, we will welcome it, because mistakes and confusion which affect airport security alarm American and other authorities.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that most of the recommendations that he has just made were made by the Select Committee in 1986 but were then totally rejected by the Department? The right hon. Gentleman confirmed that rejection a few weeks ago in correspondence to me. What made him change his mind? I am pleased that he has changed his mind, because checks on luggage into Heathrow will improve security, but how much will it cost, and will that cost be borne by the passenger or the taxpayer, or financed by a levy fund system as recommended by the Select Committee? The last method is the one overall way to deal with the financing of airport security.

What about the other recommendation of the Select Committee that there should be someone in overall control of security and directly responsible when a mistake such as those that we have seen in the past few months is made?

As the Secretary of State referred to the view of the Americans—there is a report about it in *The Independent* today—can he tell us whether he agrees that the American authorities feel that our security is so bad that they will impose their higher conditions of security on their aeroplanes? That is a comment on our level of security. Does the Secretary of State accept that, as he so often avoided his responsibilities by saying that the breach of airport security on the PanAm flight was the responsibility of PanAm, the operator, rather than his responsibility, that is why the Americans take the view that there is inadequate security and control, particularly by the Secretary of State, of airport security in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Channon: That was a typical question from the hon. Gentleman. If he thinks that I spend my time trying to avoid making statements to the House, I may say that I have not been particularly successful over the past few months.

To answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), I have announced a progress report on what is a continuing review.

To answer the hon. Gentleman, the cost will be borne by the passenger; extra costs on airlines and airports will inevitably be passed on. I am not persuaded by the case for a levy, which would raise no new money. It is merely a way of transferring money from one pocket to another and will not raise a single extra halfpenny. The person in overall control is the airport manager, and the new inspectorate will have an important role in inspecting airports even more energetically than at present. I reject completely the hon. Gentleman's view of the United States' opinion of our aviation security. There is not the faintest evidence to back up his unfounded and irresponsible claim. I shall be discussing this matter with Mr. Skinner, and I shall be amazed if he takes the Prescott line.

Arms Trafficking (Paris Arrests)

3.47 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester Gorton) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy following the arrest in Paris of three members of the Ulster Defence Association in the company of a South African diplomat on a charge of illegally possessing weapons.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): We have been informed by the French authorities of the arrest in Paris of three United Kingdom citizens and one American on 21 April on charges of arms trafficking, receipt of stolen goods, and criminal conspiracy of a terrorist nature. Consular access is being sought to the three United Kingdom citizens.

The Government are seriously concerned at the implications of the charges brought by the French authorities. The matter is sub judice and it is extremely important not to prejudice the French legal proceedings in any way. The South African ambassador in London was today summoned to the Foreign Office to be told of the grave view taken by the British Government of the implications of the charges and of the alleged involvement of a member of the South African embassy in Paris. The House will wish to be assured that since the initial reports of thefts in Northern Ireland became known my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been subjecting security arrangements at Shorts and other establishments in Northern Ireland to a most thorough review.

Mr. Kaufman: I congratulate all involved in the successful operation in Paris.

Does not that operation reveal an alarming state of affairs—a conspiracy whereby South Africa has supplied so-called Loyalists with lethal weapons for use in terrorist actions in Ulster in quest of access to information, replicas and models of British missiles? In view of a succession of successful burglaries at Shorts, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman guarantee the security of the Starstreak missile in particular, as well as Javelin and Blowpipe?

Is it not a fact that weapons supplied by South Africa as part of this bloodstained deal have already been responsible for the deaths of innocent people in Northern Ireland and that grenades supplied by South Africa have been thrown at the police in Northern Ireland?

In the knowledge of the fact that South Africans have supplied arms for murder in Northern Ireland, did the Forein Secretary raise this act of aggression when he met the South African Foreign Minister last month? Did the Prime Minister do so when she met that same Minister this month? How can the Prime Minister have told a South African newspaper:

"I consistently have made clear the total opposition and abhorrence of the British Government for terrorist actions"

when she must have known that the South Africans have been responsible for making possible terrorist action inside the United Kingdom?

Today, all hon. Members have received a letter from the Foreign Secretary declaring:

"our message is getting through where it matters most—inside South Africa".

[Mr. Kaufman]

Is this conspiracy the response to that message? Is this conspiracy the response to the tact and persuasion that the Prime Minister says she uses with South Africa?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman consult other European Community Foreign Ministers urgently to obtain united action, involving the expulsion of all South African intelligence agents and arms purchasers posing as diplomats? Will he call back the South African ambassador in London and tell him to withdraw all members of his staff with duties comparable to those of Mr. Storm?

Will the Government now cut off to South Africa all supplies of equipment, spare parts and vehicles which can be used for military purposes? Is it not time that Britain acted in line with world opinion and imposed sanctions on South Africa's incorrigible regime?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I can begin by thanking the right hon. Gentleman for his congratulations to those concerned with bringing this matter to the state it has so far reached. I find it difficult to agree with several of the other points that he raised.

The right hon. Gentleman will surely acknowledge that the success of this operation thus far underlines the extent to which the Government have been, are and remain totally committed to enforcement of the United Nations arms embargo to South Africa. That is why I said that we take an extremely serious view of the facts so far disclosed in this matter. I emphasise "the facts so far disclosed" because it is by a long way too early to come to any conclusions about the implications of this matter, let alone some of the earlier ones to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

The right hon. Gentleman is quite right to emphasise the need for the closest possible attention to security in relation to manufacturing processes in Northern Ireland. I have said that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is closely concerned with that.

The right hon. Gentleman will understand that we are well aware of the nature of some of the agencies and authorities that are involved in a matter of this kind. That is all the more reason for working in a manner which is most effective to secure the removal of apartheid from South Africa. It is our continuing and firm belief that the present policy of the Government is best calculated to achieve that end.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that I regret every bit as much as he does the rather deplorable events which have occurred in Paris during the past 48 hours? If, as has been suggested in the House today, South African weapons have given rise to terrorist action in Ulster, that is a profoundly regrettable consequence. However, before my right hon. and learned Friend reaches a final conclusion, will he bear in mind the fact that many of us, including many of my constituents, take just as grave a view of the way in which SWAPO and the ANC obtain SAM-7 and Stinger-type missiles so that the South Africans are compelled by the international arms embargo to resort to deplorable methods to obtain arms themselves?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that I should join my hon. Friend in discussing SWAPO's access to weapons in different circumstances, save to underline the extent to which we deplore the use of violence as a means of promoting political objectives in southern Africa as in our own country. However, I am glad to have his endorsement of the view that I have expressed that the implications of the facts so far disclosed could be extremely serious, and the fact that he has endorsed that is significant.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the military importance of the incident we are discussing is demonstrated by the fact that the South African Government were apparently willing to pay £1 million for the model of the missile which was sought to be obtained in Paris? He has also told the House that a review of the security has been taking place. If that is the case, why did the Minister of State for the Armed Forces say in response to a written question from me:

"Security of all Ministry of Defence establishments and bases is kept under constant review as a matter of course. I have no plans at present to commission a specific investigation into security at territorial army bases in Northern Ireland."—[*Official Report*, 20 April 1989; Vol 151, c. *278*.]

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On the hon. and learned Gentleman's last point, I cannot comment on the precise formulation of the matter to which he has referred, but I can assure him that since the initial reports of security risks and thefts came to light, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has set in hand a very close review of security at such premises. I cannot confirm or deny the specific figure that the hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned, but it goes without saying that the South African authorities are prepared to go to considerable lengths to outwit the United Nations arms embargo. That is why we apply ourselves so energetically to upholding its enforcement.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Is there any evidence that South African weapons have been used in terrorist incidents in Northern Ireland, as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) claimed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot offer the House any concluded judgment on that today, but obviously if it were firmly established it would add to the gravity of a serious situation.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Secretary of State shed further light on the incident, as we have only press speculation? I do not want to speculate as to whether any court proceedings are developing but is there any truth in the suggestion by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that the UDA was involved? Furthermore, on a day when the people of south Belfast have suffered another terrorist attack on a police station and after a weekend when women have been murdered, is it not rather hypocritical to spend time attacking South Africa when the ANC and the IRA have been collaborating in the attack on British people in Northern Ireland?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, it is not possible to be more specific about a number of matters that have been raised for discussion by the facts so far reported, not only because we do not wish to say or do anything that may interfere with the conduct of proceedings in France—which is important—but in addition, one has to take care about the revelation of

sensitive material in answer to any further questions. The inescapable fact is that any involvement on either side of the tragic conflict in Northern Ireland involving the supply of weapons that may add to the hazard to life and limb there is to be deplored, and any fresh aspect of it raises serious questions.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My right hon. and learned Friend will have the support of the whole House in deprecating the stealing of weapons. Bearing in mind that the Government wisely operate an arms embargo policy against South Africa, has my right hon. and learned Friend or any of his ministerial colleagues received any evidence from the Opposition about the illegal supply of arms as was suggested by the shadow Foreign Secretary? I have heard of no such evidence being put forward, yet the fact that we have an official arms embargo is rarely recognised by Opposition Members.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I can assure my hon. Friend that any suggestion of the supply of weapons in breach of the arms embargo is always investigated with the utmost thoroughness. I hope that he will accept, as does the rest of the House, that the facts I have so far disclosed today suggest that that thoroughness is not in vain.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The supply of arms to Northern Ireland is one of the major reasons why the tragic events of the past 20 years have lasted so long. In a country in which relatively few people are involved in violence, the arrival of those weapons, whether from Colonel Gaddafi or money given to the United States, and whether they go to Republican or Loyalist organisations, does not matter much. What matters is that the arms are getting through.

Will the Foreign Secretary ensure that we receive accurate information as to whether it is true, as is reported in the newspapers, that the UDA—a working class group—has received arms from South Africa and that now the new organisation, which I understand is a middle class group that has arisen in the past year or two, also has arms contacts in South Africa? One way of stopping the supply of arms is to know more about the people involved. I had never heard of the movement until a few weeks ago. It is an insidious development, and I hope that we can have more information.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman is correct to remind us of the central fact, which is that the availability of any weapons on either side of the troubled Province of Northern Ireland is a matter that we must do everything possible to prevent. One cannot be sure where they will end up or what will happen to them. That is why we are making such an enormous effort to try to achieve that.

The facts and evidence underlying the matters I have announced today have not yet been fully explored, but it is entirely right that at the right time and in the right way every possible use should be made of them to identify those responsible for the acquisition, financing and importation of those weapons. Every action should be taken thereafter to demonstrate how seriously we view the matter and how determined we are to stamp it out.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that most impartial people would regard these events, if they are proved to be true, as every bit as reprehensible as the relationship that appears to exist between the IRA and Libya? If the charges are well founded and those concerned are found guilty, will my right hon. and learned Friend consider our diplomatic relationships with South Africa in the light of the decision taken some time ago about our diplomatic relationships with Libya?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand why my hon. Friend is concerned about the possible gravity of some of the implications of the facts so far known and I appreciate that concern. However, we must acknowledge that the shape and nature of diplomatic relations must be considered in the light of many different considerations, one of which is the extent to which we are able to continue representing to the Government of another country the case we feel strongly needs to be taken into account.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): When will the Foreign Secretary recognise that South Africa is willing to do the maximum damage to Britain's interest, as is Libya, in supporting the other side of terrorism in Northern Ireland? Does he recall the case in Coventry just five years ago when the South African authorities double-crossed the British Government and the judicial authorities and the people who were bailed did not return to Britain? Is it not time we started to recognise the immense danger to this country of South Africa's terrorist activities, including acts of terrorism carried out in various parts of Europe? When he sees the ambassador, I hope that he will tell him of the strength of feeling in the House of Commons.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is clear from what has already been said on both sides of the House that there is grave concern at the implications of the facts so far known in this matter. I shall take care to ensure that the South African Government are in no doubt about that. The precise extent to which this or that action should be equated with the action of any other Government has to be considered in the light of all the circumstances. We should leave every Government in no doubt that the promotion of the supply of weapons for violent, terrorist purposes within this Kingdom is a matter of the utmost seriousness.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Foreign Secretary take this opportunity to refute as totally unfounded and disgraceful suggestions that the African National Congress has been collaborating with the IRA to murder British citizens? Does he recollect that the South African Government boasted that they would not send back from South Africa people charged in this country with breaching the oil embargo who had been allowed to return under the gravest assurances given by the South African embassy? Now that South Africa has become involved in affairs in Northern Ireland, would it not make more sense, rather than simply calling in the ambassador to tell him how displeased he is, if the Foreign Secretary insisted that the military attaché department in Trafalgar Square was closed and the South African ambassador was sent back to South Africa as a mark of our intention to do something other than simply mouth platitudes?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman will know that all allegations of links between the ANC and the IRA and any other terrorist organisations are thoroughly investigated. It is made clear to the ANC, as to other organisations, that it is entitled to remain in this country so long as it complies with our laws.

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

The hon. Gentleman will recall that the case which came before the Coventry courts was last dealt with in a statement on 23 October 1984 by my right hon. and learned Friend, now the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he was Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The hon. Gentleman will recall that in September 1985 Community countries agreed to recall military attachés accredited to South Africa and to refuse to grant accreditation to new South African military attachés. British attachés were withdrawn from South Africa in 1985, the South African armed forces attaché left London in July 1987 and the air and naval attaché left in December 1987.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): In the last year for which we have figures, 1986-87, this country was the world's second largest arms supplier behind the United States and ahead of the Soviet bloc. Is it not evident that our factories and manufacturing plants involved in that trade, which amounts to about £6 billion a year in exports, are bound to be prey to Governments such as the South African Government who exist only because of their use of weapons? Will the Foreign Secretary have words with his Cabinet colleagues to ensure that, notwithstanding the policy to continue with a massive trade in weapons, at least the security of the factories and the people working in them is greatly enhanced?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the importance, in any country supplying weapons on any scale, of the tightest possible control over the licensing and export of any such weapons and the places in which they are stored and manufactured. As I have already said, that is a matter of which my right hon. Friends are well aware.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an extension of Question Time, and we must move on as we have a heavy day ahead of us.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the two motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Estates of Deceased Persons and Inheritances and on Gifts) (Sweden) Order 1989 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Beef Special Premium (Protection of Payments) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 574) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Points of Order

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have just had a private notice question about Blowpipe missiles. At present the destination of Blowpipe missiles is——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that I was not able to call the hon. Gentleman; he was not alone in that. A private notice question is an extension of Question Time and I allowed nearly 20 minutes on it, which is much longer than I would normally allow for a question.

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is selfish of the hon. Gentleman to persist. If it is a matter of order, I shall deal with it, but not if it is an extension of Question Time.

Mr. Cohen: On a point or order, Mr. Speaker. I am asking a question of you, Mr. Speaker, not of the Minister. At present questions about the supply of Blowpipe missiles to the terrorists in countries such as Nicaragua or Afghanistan are blocked by the Table Office. As we have now been able to ask questions about it on the Floor of the House, will you take steps to unblock the tabling of such questions in future?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke) *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members should look at the Order Paper to see how much business we must get through today.

Mr. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask for your advice on a serious matter concerning freedom of speech? The House jealously guards its right of freedom of speech, and hon. Members have a duty to protect it, which includes the process by which hon. Members are elected. Conservative party election posters in the Vale of Glamorgan have been wantonly destroyed by the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). Has he approached you, Mr. Speaker, about making a statement?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter of order in the House.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This has nothing to do with exchanges, but you, Mr. Speaker, may have heard the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs refer to the procedure in a French court as being sub judice. Since the Wright case, it has been generally accepted that the sub judice rule applies only to British courts.

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear the Secretary of State say that, but if he did I must tell hon. Members that the matter may be sub judice in French courts but it is not yet so in ours.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that the Chair has no power if a Minister chooses to answer a question lifted from the Order Paper rather than make a statement, thereby excluding you, Mr. Speaker, from the parliamentary process? Did the Minister seek your authority to make

a statement? Will you confirm that the effect of the procedural device, compared with a statement, used by the Secretary of State—he has been under much pressure lately and we understand that he is aware of his vulnerability—is that, first, it restricts the amount of time available—although you, Mr. Speaker, allowed every hon. Member who stood to take part and we are grateful for that? Secondly, it limits the Opposition Front Bench spokesman to a single intervention at the end of the statement. Thirdly, and most important, because that device was used, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who had to put up with snide comments from the Secretary of State, had no prior knowledge of the statement's contents, which is a normal courtesy, and therefore had no opportunity to consider the details of a matter that is of profound national importance, in which the Minister's previous incompentence has been a matter of grave national concern.

Mr. Speaker: The House should understand that, because of the shuffle, the question might have been answered earlier. If we had not reached oral question No. 35 today, it would have received a written answer. No request for a statement was made, and the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) rightly said that I have no authority to stop questions being answered at the end.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): You, Mr. Speaker, may have noticed from today's Votes and Proceedings that there are already 736 early-day motions on the Order Paper, a large proportion of which have been tabled by Opposition Members, who are keen to climb on any bandwagon. Will you raise with the printers of the Votes and Proceedings the strange absence of an early-day motion, which Opposition Members have surely tabled under our democratic procedures, condemning the unwarranted invasion of personal property perpetrated by the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) of ripping down election posters—an act that was witnessed by television cameras?

Mr. Speaker: So far as I know, such an early-day motion does not appear on the Order Paper, but it may well do so tomorrow.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said that if question No. 35, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), had come up earlier in the shuffle the Secretary of State could have answered it. What is the purpose of having the shuffle if Ministers can decide what questions they will answer by making a statement from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Minister, but the hon. Gentleman well knows that we have had a private notice question on this matter from the Leader of the Opposition. It is a matter of considerable interest to the House. I said that oral questions that are not reached on the Order Paper receive a written answer.

Orders of the Day

Social Security Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Ordered,

That the Social Security Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, any new Clauses standing in the name of a member of the Government, any new Schedules standing in such a name, other new Clauses, amendments relating to Clauses 1 to 16, Schedule 1, Clauses 17 and 18, Schedule 2, Clause 19, Schedule 3, Clause 20, Schedule 4, Clause 21, Schedule 5, Clauses 22 and 23, Schedule 6, Clauses 24 to 30, other new Schedules, amendments relating to Schedules 7 and 8.—*[Mr. Moore.]*

New Clause 7

AMENDMENTS RELATING TO PRIMARY CLASS 1 CONTRIBUTIONS

'(1) In section 4 of the principal Act, for subsections (6) to (6B) (computation of primary Class 1 contributions) there shall be substituted—

"(6) Where a primary Class 1 contribution is payable, the amount of that contribution shall be the aggregate of—

(a) the initial primary percentage of so much of the earnings paid in the tax week, in respect of the employment in question, as does not exceed the current lower earnings limit; and

(b) the main primary percentage of so much of those earnings as exceeds that limit but does not exceed the upper earnings limit;

but this subsection is subject to regulations under subsection (7) below or sections 128 to 132 below and to section 27 of the Pensions Act (contracted-out rates).

(6A) For the purposes of this Act the primary percentages shall be as follows—

(a) the initial primary percentage shall be 2 per cent.; and

(b) the main primary percentage shall be 9 per cent.;

but the rates of those primary percentages are subject to alteration under sections 122 and 123A below.

(6B) In the case of earners paid otherwise than weekly, any reference in subsection (6) above to the current upper, or (as the case may be) lower, earnings limit shall be taken as a reference to the prescribed equivalent of that limit."(2) In subsection (6F) of that section (alteration of number of primary or secondary brackets) the words "primary

or" shall be omitted.

(3) In section 122 of that Act (additional power to alter contributions) for paragraph (a) of subsection (1) there shall be substituted—

"(a) the percentage rate specified—

(i) as the initial primary percentage in section 4(6A)(a);

(ii) as the main primary percentage in section 4(6A)(b);"

(4) In subsection (4) of that section (variation of rates for purpose of adjusting Redundancy Fund) for paragraph (a) there shall be substituted—

"(a) the percentage rate specified—

(i) as the initial primary percentage in section 4(6A)(a);

(ii) as the main primary percentage in section 4(6A)(b); ".

(5) In subsection (6) of that section, for paragraph (a) (maximum variation in Class 1 rates of 0·25 percentage points there shall be substituted—

"(a) to increase for any tax year—

(i) the percentage rate of the initial or main primary percentage, or

(ii) the percentage rate for secondary Class 1 contributions,

to a percentage rate more than 0·25 per cent. higher than the percentage rate applicable at the end of the preceding tax year for the primary percentage or secondary Class 1 contribution in question; or"

(6) In section 123A of that Act (further power to alter certain contributions) for subsection (1) there shall be substituted—

"(1) For the purpose of adjusting amounts payable by way of primary Class 1 contributions, the Secretary of State may at any time make an order altering—

(a) the percentage rate specified as the initial primary percentage in section 4(6A)(a);

(b) the percentage rate specified as the main primary percentage in section 4(6A)(b)."

(7) In subsection (3) of that section, for paragraph (a) (limit on increase of primary Class 1 rates) there shall be substituted—

"(a) to alter the percentage rate of the initial or main primary percentage to a percentage rate more than 0·25 per cent. higher than the percentage rate applicable at the end of the preceding tax year for the primary percentage in question; or"

(8) In section 134 of that Act (destination of contributions) in paragraphs (a) and (i) of subsection (4) ("appropriate national health service allocation" and "appropriate employment protection allocation", when in force, to include specified percentage of earnings in respect of which primary Class 1 contributions were paid) after the word "paid" there shall be inserted the words "at the main primary percentage rate".

(9) In Schedule 20 of that Act (glossary of expressions) there shall be inserted at the appropriate places—

"Initial primary percentage"; "main primary percentage"; "primary percentage"	See section 4(6) and (6A). Construe "initial primary percentage rate" and "main primary percentage rate" as references to the percentage rates from time to time specified in section 4(6A)(a) or (b) as the initial or, as the case may be, main primary percentage."
"Main primary percentage"	See "initial primary percentage"; "main primary percentage"; "primary percentage" above."
"Primary percentage"	See "initial primary percentage"; "main primary percentage"; "primary percentage" above."—*[Mr. Moore.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Moore): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 7 and 10.

Mr. Moore: The purpose of the clause is to reform the structure of employees class 1 national insurance contributions, to reduce those contributions for almost all employees and to abolish the steps in contribution rates between the lower and upper earnings limits. These changes were announced by the Chancellor in his Budget statement on 14 March 1989 and build on the reforms enacted in 1985 when the reduced national insurance contribution rates of 5 per cent. and 7 per cent. for lower paid workers were introduced.

The 1985 reforms were a welcome change for the lower paid, but there was a major difficulty. When a person's earnings crossed the lower earnings limit for national insurance, he had to pay a 5 per cent. contribution on all his earnings. An individual earning £42 a week in 1989-90 would pay no contributions. A pay increase of £1 will take his weekly earnings over the lower earnings limit of £43 a week and he will then pay a contribution of 5 per cent. on all his earnings—£2·15 a week—which is considerably more than his increase in earnings. There are similar effects when earnings rise above £75 and £115 a week—the earnings levels at which the higher 7 per cent. and 9 per cent. rates come into force. Not surprisingly, people are deterred from increasing their earnings to take them over these cliff edges.

People keeping their earnings below the lower earnings limit can be excluded from a wide range of national insurance benefits. Under the reformed system, which comes into effect in October, people earning less than the lower earnings limit—£43 a week for 1989-90—will still pay no contributions. Individuals earning more than £43 a week will pay contributions at 2 per cent.—the initial percentage rate—on the first £43 of weekly earnings and at 9 per cent.—the main percentage rate—on earnings above £43 a week up to the upper earnings limit of £325. At the current lower earnings limit, the national insurance entry fee is just 86p a week. Individuals earning at this level throughout the year will earn entitlement to all national insurance benefits for this small weekly sum.

The single 9 per cent. rate of earnings above the lower earnings limit will remove the steps in contributions that occur on changing from 5 per cent. to 7 per cent. and from 7 per cent. to 9 per cent. A pay increase of just £1 above the £75 and £115 earnings limit means that people will no longer be worse off overall by over £1 a week through higher contributions. The clause will entirely remove the disincentives for individuals to increase their weekly earnings above those earnings limits.

The change will lead to lower contributions generally. From October, 15 million people earning more than £115 a week will pay £3 a week less in national insurance contributions. The 4 million people earning less than £115 a week will not gain as much, but they have already gained from the 1985 reforms, and the combined effect of those reforms and those proposals will result in a gain of £3 a week. They will also benefit from the removal of the cliff edges at £75 and £115 a week, which may have kept down their net earnings. The new system will cost, in terms of lower national insurance contributions, about £1 billion in 1989-90 and about £2·8 billion in 1990-91, which will be its full first year of operation.

The clause removes the steps in national insurance contributions, which were disincentives for employees to increase their hours of work. It reduces the class 1 contributions for almost all employees by up to £3 a week. It provides entitlement to all contributory benefits, including the basic retirement pension, for as little as 86p a week.

I am sure that the measure will be widely welcomed and I commend the clause and associated amendments to the House.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I should like to continue a conversation that I had during an earlier Question Time with Ministers on the Treasury Bench. I made a plea that the Government should not rest on their laurels and leave their reform of national insurance at this stage. I was concerned specifically with the growth of part-time work and with the fact that 40 per cent. of all part-time jobs in the EEC are in this country. In reply, the Secretary of State said that the reason was probably that large numbers of workers wanted part-time jobs.

I accept that many people want to work part time, and they should have the opportunity to do so. However, at that time I was making a separate point. If employers' contributions are exempted up to the lower ceiling, as it now is, there is an incentive for them to pay people below that level—in other words, to create part-time jobs—whereas, if there were no rigging of the market by national insurance contributions, they might create full-time jobs. I should like the Government to consider that aspect.

I should like to underline a point made by the Secretary of State. For the small sum of 86p a week, people at that end of the market get a very good deal.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 10

BENEFITS FOR WOMEN WIDOWED BEFORE 11TH APRIL 1988

'(1) In the case of a widow whose late husband died before 11th April 1988 and who either—

(a) was over the age of 40 but under the age of 55 at the time of her husband's death, or

(b) is over the age of 40 but under the age of 55 at the time when she ceases to be entitled to a widowed mother's allowance,

section 26 of the principal Act (widow's pension) shall have effect, and be taken always to have had effect, as if section 36(3) of the 1986 1986 (which substituted "45" for "40", and "55" for "50", in subsections (1) and (2)) had never been enacted.

(2) The Social Security (Widow's Benefit and Retirement Pensions) Amendment Regulations 1987 shall have effect, and be taken always to have had effect, with the addition at the end of regulation 3 (transitional provision for widowed mother's allowance where husband died before 11th April 1988) of the following—

"(3) In determining whether a widow—

(a) whose late husband died on or after 7th October 1987 and before 11th April 1988, and

(b) who became entitled to a widow's allowance on his death,

is also entitled, after the cessation of that allowance, to a widowed mother's allowance for any period beginning on or after 11th April 1988, regulation 16(1) of the principal Regulations shall apply as if regulation 2(6) above had not been made.

(4) In determining whether a widow—

(a) whose late husband died before 11th April 1988,

(b) who immediately before that date was entitled to a widowed mother's allowance otherwise than by virtue of regulation 16(1) of the principal Regulations, and

(c) who would, apart from this paragraph, cease to be entitled to that allowance on or after that date,

is entitled to such an allowance for any period beginning on or after that date, that regulation shall apply as if regulation 2(6) above had not been made."

(3) The Social Benefit (Dependency) Amendment Regulations 1989 shall have effect, and be taken always to have had effect, with the insertion after regulation 3 (which made amendments concerning widowed mother's allowance to regulation 4B of the Social Security Benefit (Dependency) Regulations 1977) of the following—

"3A. The first amendment made by regulation 3 above shall not have effect in relation to a widow whose late husband died before 11th April 1988.".

(4) in any case where—

(a) a claim for a widow's pension or a widowed mother's allowance is made, or treated as made, before the passing of this Act, and

(b) the Secretary of State has made a payment to or for the claimant on the ground that if the claim had been received immediately after its passing she would have been entitled to that pension or allowance, or entitled to it at a higher rate, for the period in respect of which the payment is made,

the payment so made shall be treated as a payment of that pension or allowance; and, if and to the extent that an award of the pension or allowace, or an award at a higher rate, is made for the period in respect of which the payment was made, the payment shall be treated as made in accordance with that award.

(5) Where, apart from section 165A of the principal Act (making of claim a condition of entitlement), a widow falling within subsection (1) above would be entitled to a widow's pension for any period beginning on or after 11th April 1988, then, notwithstanding anything in that section, she shall be entitled to that pension for that period if she has made a claim for it before the end of the period of twelve months beginning with the passing of this Act.

(6) Where a widow's late husband died on or after 7th October 1987 and before 11th April 1988 and, apart from section 165A of the principal Act, she would have become entitled to a widow's allowance on his death, then if either—

(a) she was over the age of 40 but under the age of 55 at the time of his death, or

(b) she would, apart from that section, have been entitled to a widowed mother's allowance on the cessation of her entitlement to the widow's allowance,

she shall, notwithstanding anything in that section, be entitled to the widow's allowance (and, accordingly, in a case falling within paragraph (b) above, to the widowed mother's allowance) if she has made a claim, or is treated as having made a claim, for it before the end of the period of twelve months beginning with the passing of this Act.

(7) Where in consequence of any of the amending provisions an adjudicating authority has decided before the passing of this Act that a widow whose husband died before 11th April 1988 either—

(a) is not entitled to a benefit under section 25 or 26 of the principal Act, or

(b) is entitled to such a benefit at a particular rate,

an adjudication officer may review that decision, notwithstanding anything in section 104 of the principal Act.

(8) In any case where—

(a) it is determined on such a review that the widow in question was entitled to a benefit under section 25 or 26 of the principal Act, or was entitled to such a benefit at a higher rate, and

(b) the application for the review was made before the end of the period of twelve months beginning with the passing of this Act,

the decision on the review may take effect on 11th April 1988 or any later date, notwithstanding any provision of any Act or instrument restricting the payment of any benefit or increase of benefit to which a person would otherwise be entitled by reason of a review in respect of any period before the review.

(9) Subsection (4) of section 104 (appeals from reviews) shall apply in relation to a review under this section as it applies in relation to a review under that section.

(10) In this section—

"adjudicating authority" means—

(a) an adjudication officer;

(b) a social security appeal tribunal;

(c) a Commissioner; and

"the amending provisions" are—

(a) section 36(3) of the 1986 Act; and

(b) regulation 2(6) of the Social Security (Widow's Benefit and Retirement Pensions) Amendment Regulations 1987 (deemed entitlement to child allowance for purposes of widowed mother's allowance etc).

(11) The amendment by this section of provisions contained in regulations shall not be taken to have prejudiced any power to make further regulations revoking or amending those provisions.

(12) Nothing in this section shall be taken to prejudice section 16 or 17 of the Interpretation Act 1978 (effect of repeals, substitutions etc).'.—*[Mr. Moore.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Moore: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 55 and 52 to 54.

Mr. Moore: The new clause extends entitlement to widows' benefit under the pre-reforms legislation to all women widowed before 11 April 1988. It will give legislative effect to the commitment that I made to the House on 28 February 1989.

When the reforms were introduced, women whose husbands had died before 11 April 1988 expected to receive widows' benefits based on the rules in force before the reform changes were made. For some widows receiving widows' allowance or widowed mothers' allowance on 11 April the reform changes meant that when their benefit ceased and their succeeding widow's pension entitlement was determined, they received either a reduced rate of pension or no pension at all. There was also a group of mothers whose youngest child was under 19 but no longer a dependant, who would have been entitled to the personal rate of widowed mothers' allowance but lost it under the reform changes. I have decided on the grounds of equity and fairness that all these entitlements should be restored. This means that these widows will regain their right to receive the benefits in line with their expectations on the day that they were widowed.

I want to make clear to the House the arrangements by which we are making payments to these widows. My Department has identified and contacted them and in many cases payments have already been made. Payments in those cases which are not covered by the commissioner's decision of 28 February—the majority—are being made on an ex gratia basis. Whilst it is right that this money should reach these widows as quickly as possible, it is not right to make ex gratia payments in the long term. Therefore, this clause includes the power to put these payments retrospectively on a statutory basis. It will also ensure, as the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) understands, that all widows receiving these payments will have access to all the adjudication rights associated with statutory benefits. These payments will, of course, be offset against any other maintenance or income-related benefit that may be or have been in payment.

These changes are expected to affect beneficially 20,000 women at an estimated net cost to public funds of around £5 million in a full year.

Any widow who thinks that she may be affected by these changes and has not been contacted should approach her local social security office.

I commend this clause and the associated amendments to the House.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): As the Secretary of State is aware, there is a 12-month period during which people can claim. Some people in receipt of widowed mothers' allowance have children who may not have reached the age of 16, so the change in their benefit may not come into question until after that period. Am I right in thinking that the right hon. Gentleman is completely confident that all those people will be picked up by his Department during the ensuing year and that there is no risk that they will not receive the benefit that is due to them?

Mr. Moore: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. Like her colleagues, she has welcomed the new clause on another occasion.

There will be no need to contact the women who are now in receipt of WMA when it converts—the date on which that happens will depend on the circumstances—to the widows' pension. That will automatically be picked up, so I can reassure the hon. Lady on that important point.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 8

ABOLITION OF EARNINGS RULE ETC.

'(1) In section 30 of the principal Act, subsection (1) (the earnings rule) shall cease to have effect.

(2) In section 28(1)(a) of that Act (conditions of entitlement to Category A retirement pension) the words "and has retired from regular employment" shall cease to have effect.

(3) In section 29 of that Act (woman's Category B retirement pension)—

(a) in subsections (2) and (3) (first and second cases of entitlement) in paragraph (a), for the words "both of them have retired from regular employment" there shall be substituted the words "has become entitled to a Category A retirement pension"; and

(b) in subsection (5), paragraph (a) (retirement, in fourth such case, to have retired from regular employment) shall cease to have effect.

(4) For section 12 of the Pensions Act (deferred retirement) there shall be substituted the following—

"*Increase of retirement pension where entitlement is deferred*

12.—(1) Where a person's entitlement to a Category A or Category B retirement pension is deferred, Schedule 1 to this Act shall have effect for increasing the rate of his pension.

(2) For the purposes of this Act and the principal Act, a person's entitlement to a Category A or Category B retirement pension is "deferred" if and so long as he does not become entitled to that pension by reason only—

(a) that he has not satisfied the conditions of section 165A of the principal Act (requirement to claim); or

(b) that, in the case of a woman's Category B retirement pension by virtue of her husband's contributions, her husband has not satisfied those conditions with respect to his Category A retirement pension;

and, in relation to any such pension, "period of deferment" shall be construed accordingly."

(5) Subsection (1) above affects the rate of pension to which a person is entitled for the week in which that subsection somes into force as well as any subsequent week ("week" having the same meaning in this subsection as it had in the proviso to the said section 30(1) immediately before its repeal).

(6) The enactments mentioned in Schedule *(Abolition of earnings rule etc.)* to this Act shall have effect with the amendments there specified.'.—*[Mr. Moore.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Moore: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 36 to 41.

Mr. Moore: The purpose of the new clause is to abolish the earnings rule for state retirement pension from 1 October 1989. There are one or two administrative points that might be of interest beyond the House. The new clause will give legislative effect to the important decision taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and me and announced in the Chancellor's Budget statement on 14 March. It will also remove the condition that individuals

must be "retired from regular employment". The clause therefore removes all the restrictions which prevent people enjoying their pension while continuing to contribute to the economy and to their own incomes through earnings.

At the moment, someone approaching pension age has to decide whether to retire from regular employment and claim his state retirement pension, or to defer retirement and get annual increments to his eventual pension of about 7·5 per cent. for the first five years after pension age. If he decides to claim his state retirement pension but continues working, his pension is reduced at the rate of 50p on every £1 earned between £75 and £79 a week, and at pound for pound for earnings over £79 a week. This means that someone who earns over £120 a week has his basic state retirement pension completely extinguished. The proposed changes are therefore wholly beneficial.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the late Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, who campaigned on this point for many years?

Mr. Moore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That suggestion will be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I unreservedly give that commendation to our late colleague who can be regarded as having been in the forefront of many of these issues.

Individuals over pension age will be able to carry on working without having their basic state retirement pension reduced. They will no longer be barred from receiving a full state retirement pension if they work more than a few hours.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this welcome measure is in no sense selective or targeted? It applies indiscriminately to all beneficiaries and retirement pensioners regardless of their income.

Mr. Moore: I have the distinct feeling that my right hon. Friend is leaping to get into the next series of debates. He is, of course, right on that point. He might be regarded as somewhat wrong—I do not want to pursue this point at large—in that there is a specific problem with regard to retirement which suggests that it covers, by definition, only a limited class of people.

We are retaining provision for people to defer drawing state retirement pension for up to five years, if they so wish. Increments will continue to be added during periods of deferral at the rate of about 7·5 per cent. per year of deferment, with a maximum increment to state retirement pension of 37·5 per cent. for five years deferral. In future this period of deferral will be known as "period of enhancement". This will allow people the option of building up a higher weekly pension for themselves for when they might need it later in life. Individuals who do that will be able to claim, as now, sickness benefit and unemployment benefit. Similarly, invalidity pensioners, as at present, will keep the current option of retaining invalidity benefit during the five years after retirement age, instead of claiming state retirement pension. Reduced earnings allowance will be available to those over pension age for as long as they are as now in regular employment.

4.30 pm

A large number of our elderly citizens stand to gain from these changes: there are 2,500 individuals who currently have their state retirement pension reduced by the earnings rule. Those individuals will be able to earn as much as they wish as well as receiving their state retirement pension. There are many more elderly people—about 200,000—who are currently deferring receipt of their state retirement pension. We believe that most of them are likely to have declined taking their pension as a result of the earnings rule. There are also a huge number of pensioners who are not earning at present and there are about 200,000 earning less than £75 a week. For them, the abolition of the earnings rule will be a considerable incentive to start earning, and to earn more.

Letting pensioners know about these changes and getting their pensions to them will be a major undertaking. In advance of receiving Royal Assent, to ensure that all individuals coming up to pension age are fully aware of other changes, a note is now being included in the pension pack setting out these changes and making clear, of course, that they are subject to parliamentary approval. We plan to write to those people who appear to be deferring claiming their state retirement pension because of the earnings rule. Claim forms will be issued to them from 30 May. Individuals whose basic state retirement pension is currently reduced on account of earnings and whose order books span 1 October will have payments of pension included at the full rate from 1 October. My Department's central offices at Newcastle and North Fylde, as well as all 500 of our local offices, will be involved in processing the claims. I am pleased to say that, despite the size of the task, we are able to give effect to the change from 1 October.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Has my right hon. Friend shared my experience that groups who help elderly people warmly approve the proposals? I have been approached by many elderly people who say how pleased they are about the changes. Has my right hon. Friend shared that experience?

Mr. Moore: Of course I have. My only regret is that we could not have made the change earlier. It has been welcomed by hon. Members of all parties.

Payments will be backdated to 1 October. Our aim is to pay as many individuals as possible by Christmas and the remainder by the end of the financial year.

The expected benefit cost of the measures to public expenditure is £190 million in 1989-90 and £375 million in 1990-91. The Government believe that this new system will provide more choice and flexibility for older people who want to carry on working. It will remove the penalty which has been an important disincentive to elderly people continuing to contribute to society their particular skills and experiences. I commend the clause and the associated amendments to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Schedule

'ABOLITION OF EARNINGS RULE ETC.

Category A and Category B retirement pensions

1. In section 27 of the principal Act, subsections (3), (4) and (5) (retirement from regular employment) shall cease to have effect.

2.—(1) In section 30 of that Act, in subsection (3) (election to be treated as if entitlement to retirement pension had commenced) the following shall cease to have effect—

(a) in paragraph (a) the words "retired from regular employment or has otherwise"; and

(b) the words "retired or".

(2) For subsection (5) of that section (advance notice of retirement) there shall be substituted the following—

"(5) In any case where—

(a) a person claims a Category A or Category B retirement pension, and

(b) the date specified in the claim as the date on which entitlement to the pension is to commence falls after the date when the claim was made,

such a pension may be awarded as from the date so specified but, if so awarded, shall be conditional on the person's not ceasing to be entitled to the pension in consequence of any election under subsection (3) above."

(3) Subsection (6)(a) of that section (power to vary 5 year period in sections 27(5) and 30(1)) shall cease to have effect.

Deferred entitlement to retirement pension

3.—(1) In Schedule 1 to the Pensions Act (deferred retirement) for the words from the beginning of the Schedule to "age" in paragraph 1 there shall be substituted—

"SCHEDULE 1

INCREASE OF PENSION WHERE ENTITLEMENT IS DEFERRED

Increase of pension where pensioner's entitlement is deferred

1. Where a person's entitlement to a Category A or Category B retirement pension is deferred,".

(2) In paragraph 2 of that Schedule, in sub-paragraph (1), for the words "period of deferment" there shall be substituted the words "period of enhancement".

(3) For sub-paragraph (2) of that paragraph (definitions) there shall be substituted—

"(2) In this Schedule—

'incremental period' means any period of six days which are treated by regulations as days of increment for the purposes of this Schedule in relation to the person and the pension in question; and

'the period of enhancement', in relation to that person and that pension, means the period which—

(a) begins on the same day as the period of deferment in question; and

(b) ends on the same day as that period or, if earlier, on the day before the fifth anniversary of the beginning of that period."

(4) In sub-paragraph (3) of that paragraph, for the words "if he had retired on attaining pensionable age" there shall be substituted the words "if his entitlement had not been deferred".

(5) In sub-paragraph (5) of that paragraph, for the words "period of deferment" in both places where they occur there shall be substituted the words "period of enhancement".

(6) In sub-paragraph (6) of that paragraph, for the words "if he had retired from regular employment" there shall be substituted the words "if his entitlement had not been deferred".

(7) In paragraph 3 of that Schedule—

(a) for the words "period of deferment" there shall be substituted the words "period of enhancement"; and

(b) for the words "if he had retired from regular employment" there shall be substituted the words "if his entitlement to the pension had commenced".

(8) In the heading preceding paragraph 4 of that Schedule, for the words "deferred retirement" there shall be substituted the words "deferred entitlement"; and in that paragraph—

(a) in sub-paragraph (1)(b)(ii) for the words "if he had retired on the date of" there shall be substituted the words "if his period of deferment had ended on the day before," and

(b) in sub-paragraph (2)(c)(ii) for the words "if she had retired on the date of" there shall be substituted the words "if her period of deferment had ended on the day before".

(9) In paragraph 5 of that Schedule (married women) for sub-paragraphs (1) and (2) there shall be substituted—

"5.—(1) For the purposes of paragraphs 1 to 3 above in their application to a Category B retirement pension to which a married woman is entitled by virtue of her husband's contributions, a married woman who would have become entitled to such a pension on an earlier day if her husband's entitlement to his Category A retirement pension had not been deferred shall be treated as having (in addition to any other period of enhancement) a period of enhancement which begins on that earlier day and ends on the same day as her husband's period of enhancement.

(2) The reference in sub-paragraph (1) above to the day on which the woman's husband's period of enhancement ends shall, where the marriage is terminated before that day, be construed as a reference to the day on which the marriage is terminated."

(10) In sub-paragraph (3) of that paragraph—

(a) for the words "if he had retired on attaining pensionable age" there shall be substituted the words "if his entitlement had not been deferred"; and

(b) for the words "if she and her husband had so retired" there shall be substituted the words "if neither her nor her husband's entitlement to a retirement pension had been deferred".

(11) In Schedule 20 to the principal Act (glossary of expressions) there shall be inserted at the appropriate places—

"Deferred" and "period of deferment" (in relation to entitlement to a Category A or Category B retirement pension)	See section 12 of the Pensions Act.
"Period of deferment" (in relation to a Category A or Category B retirement pension)	See "deferred" and "period of deferment" above."

Unemployment and sickness benefit

4.—(1) In section 14 of the principal Act, in subsection (2) (conditions of entitlement for unemployment and sickness benefit) for paragraphs (b) and (c) there shall be substituted—

"(b) on that day the person—

(i) is over pensionable age, but not more than five years over that age; and

(ii) would be entitled to a Category A retirement pension (section 28) if his entitlement had not been deferred or if he had not made an election under section 30(3) below; or

(c) on that day the person—

(i) is over pensionable age, but not more than five years over that age; and

(ii) would be entitled to a Category B retirement pension by virtue of the contributions of his deceased spouse, but for any such deferment or election."

(2) In subsection (6) of that section (rate of benefit: disregard of certain increases) the words following paragraph (c) shall cease to have effect.

Invalidity pension

5.—(1) In section 15 of that Act (invalidity pension) in subsection (1)(b)(ii) for the words "and not having retired from regular employment" there shall be substituted the words ",but not more than five years over it,".

(2) For subsection (2) of that section (additional conditions for those over pensionable age) there shall be substituted—

"(2) The conditions of this subsection are that on that day—

(a) the person would be entitled to a Category A retirement pension (section 28) if his entitlement had not been deferred or if he had not made an election under section 30(3) below; or

(b) the person would be entitled to a Category B retirement pension by virtue of the contributions of his deceased spouse, but for any such deferment or election."

(3) In subsection (6)(a) of that section (regulations making provision for persons over pensionable age corresponding to section 50A) the words "but have not retired from regular employment" shall cease to have effect.

Category C retirement pension

6. In section 39(1)(b) of that Act (Category C pension for retired women over pensionable age whose husband is entitled to such pension) the words "and has retired from regular employment" shall cease to have effect.

Increases for dependants

7. Section 48(2) and (3) (application of earnings rule in connection with increase of Category A pension in respect of dependants) shall cease to have effect.

Industrial injuries benefit

8.—(1) In section 50A of the principal Act (sickness benefit in respect of industrial injury) in subsection (3)(b) for the words "but has not retired from regular employment" there shall be substituted the words "but who is not for the time being entitled to a Category A or Category B retirement pension."

(2) In section 59B of that Act (retirement allowance etc) in subsection (1)—

(a) in paragraph (b), for the words from the beginning to "from" there shall be substituted the words "gives up";

(b) in paragraph (c), for the words "retired or is deemed to have retired" there shall be substituted the words "gave up such employment"; and

(c) in the words following that paragraph, for the words from "retires" onwards there shall be substituted the words "gives up regular employment and may become entitled to it again only if he returns to regular employment."

(3) In subsection (3) of that section (duration of entitlement) for the words "Unless he makes an election in accordance with regulations under section 30(3) above" there shall be substituted the words "Unless he returns to regular employment".

(4) For subsection (4) of that section there shall be substituted—

"(4) If he returns to regular employment, his entitlement to retirement allowance shall cease on the day on which he does so; but he may again become entitled to reduced earnings allowance or, if he again gives up regular employment, retirement allowance."

(5) In subsection (5) of that section (rate of benefit) for paragraph (a) there shall be substituted—

"(a) 25 per cent. of the weekly rate at which he was last entitled to reduced earnings allowance; or".

(6) After subsection (6) of that section there shall be inserted—

"(7) Regulations may—

(a) make provision with respect to the meaning of "regular employment" for the purposes of this section; and

(b) prescribe circumstances in which, and periods for which, a person is or is not to be regarded for those purposes as having given up, or returned to, such employment.

(8) Regulations under subsection (7) above may, in particular—

(a) provide for a person to be regarded—

(i) as having given up, or as not having returned to, regular employment, notwithstanding that he is or intends to be an earner; or

(ii) as having returned to, or as not having given up, regular employment, notwithstanding that he has or may have one or more days of interruption of employment; and

(b) prescribe circumstances in which a person is or is not to be regarded as having given up, or returned to, regular employment by reference to—

(i) the level of frequency of his earnings during a prescribed period; or

(ii) the number of hours for which he works during a prescribed period calculated in a prescribed manner."

(7) In section 2 of the Social Security Act 1988, for subsection (8) (which provides that no retired person over pensionable age shall be entitled to reduced earnings allowance except under subsection (4) of that section) there shall be substituted—

"(8) Subsection (4) above shall, in prescribed circumstances, cease to apply in the case of a person who is engaged in regular employment; and, subject to regulations, any subsequent entitlement of his to reduced earnings allowance or retirement allowance shall be determined as if that subsection had never been enacted.

(8A) In subsection (8) above, "regular employment" has the same meaning as it has in section 59B of the Social Security Act 1975 (retirement allowance) and regulations may prescribe circumstances in which a person is or is not to be regarded as engaged in such employment."(8) Subsection (9) of that section (definitions relating to retirement) shall cease to have effect.

Category B retirement pension for widower

9.—(1) In section 8 of the Pensions Act, in subsection (1) (conditions of entitlement for widower's Category B pension) the words "who has retired from regular employment" shall cease to have effect.

(2) For subsection (3) of that section (period of entitlement) there shall be substituted—

"(3) Subject to the provisions of the principal Act, a man shall become entitled to a Category B retirement pension on the day on which the conditions of entitlement become satisfied in his case and his entitlement shall continue throughout his life."

Invalidity pensions for widows and widowers

10.—(1) In section 15 of that Act, in subsection (5) (disentitlement to widow's invalidity pension)—

(a) for the words "and has retired from regular employment" there shall be substituted the words "and is entitled to a Category A or Category B retirement pension"; and

(b) for the words "she retires from regular employment, having attained" there shall be substituted the words "she has attained".

(2) In section 16 of that Act, in subsection (5) (disentitlement to widower's invalidity pension)—

(a) for the words "and has retired from regular employment" there shall be substituted the words "and is entitled to a Category A or Category B retirement pension"; and

(b) for the words "he retires from regular employment, having attained" there shall be substituted the words "he has attained".

Occupational and personal pensions

11. In section 29 of that Act (contracted-out rates of benefit) in subsection (2) (circumstances in which a person is treated as entitled to a guaranteed minimum pension) before the word "if" in each of the places where it occurs there shall be inserted respectively "(a)", "(b)" and "(c)"; and at the end of that subsection there shall be inserted the words "or

(d) if its commencement had not been postponed, as mentioned in section 33(3) below.".'.—*[Mr. Moore.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

Uprating of Child Benefit

'In section 63(3) of the 1986 Act, at the end there shall be added the following paragraph—

'(c) mentioned in subsection (1)(f) above.'.—*[Mrs. Beckett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take new clause 2—*Social Security Act 1986*—

'In section 63(3) of the Social Security Act 1986 for "(c) or (d) above" there shall be substituted "(c), (d) or, in any Order having effect on or after 1st April 1990, (f), (child benefit), above".'

Mr. Cook: I want to follow the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who referred to the late Sir Brandon Rhys Williams. I assure the hon. Lady that the absence of——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It has been pointed out that the hon. Gentleman's name is not on the new clause. Will an hon. Member whose name is on it move it formally?

Mrs. Beckett: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure the House that I agree with the words of my hon. Friend.

I was paying tribute to the memory of Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, whose absence from these debates is much regretted by Opposition and Conservative Members, not simply by Conservative Members. There would be no more fitting tribute to the memory of the late Sir Brandon Rhys Williams than for the House to pass new clause 1 or new clause 2. Sir Brandon was indefatigable in his defence of child benefit and in his campaigns to secure regular and honest upratings of that benefit.

This is not the first occasion on which the House has had the opportunity to debate the freezing of child benefit. We did so most recently in January, on a Supply day motion tabled by the Opposition. On that occasion, a number of Conservative Members were good enough to say that they agreed with us on the issue, but could not vote for the motion because it was a Labour motion. I must confess that I am not entirely persuaded that that in itself is a good enough reason for not supporting a motion with which one agrees. However, that difficulty is now removed because those hon. Members have tabled their own new clause. It may be helpful to them—and make the evening more interesting for the Whips—if the vote at the end of the debate is on new clause 2 rather than on new clause 1. It may be for the convenience of the House for me to say now that we do not propose to press new clause 1 to a vote. I hope that that will also assist in keeping those on the Treasury Bench rather more on the edge of their seats than they might otherwise have been.

The regularity with which this issue has been debated must have at least the one essential function of convincing those on the Treasury Bench that the issue will not go away, but will return to harass them repeatedly until they accept the logic of the case or dispose more satisfactorily of it than they have in our previous debates on child benefit. Every year, the Secretary of State reviews whether child benefit should be uprated. We are assured that it is mere coincidence that in both years in which the present Secretary of State has carried out the review he has decided that it is appropriate to freeze child benefit. He dare not state that child benefit should be frozen as a general principle because he would be in breach of the law that obliges him to review annually the level of child benefit. That leaves him in a rather uncomfortable position. He is unable to attack the benefit openly and to state that he would wish it to wither away. But, because he cannot openly attack the benefit, he has some difficulty in justifying why he never thinks it right to uprate child benefit. His difficulty tonight is compounded because new clause 2 in particular clearly focuses not on what should happen this year, but on what should happen next year. If the Secretary of State invites us to reject new clause 2, he is inviting the House to leave open the possibility that next year he may choose again to freeze child benefit for the third successive year.

In so far as the Secretary of State has come near to justifying such a freeze in our previous debates, he has done so on the basis that it is cheaper to control access to child support through the means test, hence the stress placed on family credit as a substitute for child benefit. With every successive debate, it is possible to evaluate more clearly whether family credit can be portrayed as a satisfactory and credible alternative to child benefit. We have continuing evidence that the number receiving family credit is far smaller than promised. The Government's initial estimate of those likely to claim family credit was 470,000. The Secretary of State will be aware that the number has never exceeded 255,000, and at the end of February the number was slightly lower than the November peak. The number of people on family credit has flattened out at half the level initially promised by Ministers when family credit was introduced in the House.

The Department of Social Security has made two responses to the rather meagre take-up. The first response —which is welcome—was the relaunch of family credit a fortnight ago, on which the Secretary of State is spending £7 million. We wish the relaunch well and hope that it will be successful. However, I hope that he will forgive us for pointing out that family credit is becoming one of the most advertised benefits. Even if the right hon. Gentleman's wildest hopes are fulfilled and the relaunch succeeds by driving up take-up by, for example, one third, it will mean that the Department is spending £100 for every new claimant for family credit. That is a large administrative overhead and I am bound to say that it contrasts badly with the administrative overheads for child benefit.

Nobody suggests that child benefit needs a relaunch. No one is proposing a £7 million recruitment campaign to recruit claimants for child benefit. On the contrary, for minimal effort, child benefit obtains a 98 per cent. take-up. That figure turns not on packaging and advertising but on the nature of the benefit. Child benefit scores high because it is well known, easily understood and simple to claim and because it is universal so there is no sense of social stigma attached to claiming it. For all those reasons, the take-up of child benefit will always be far higher than anything that can be achieved by any means-tested benefit.

The other response from Ministers to the low take-up of family credit was less elevated. Confronted with a problem, the Government changed the figures, as they so frequently do. The new figures produced by the Secretary of State a month ago knock a quarter of a million off the estimate of those eligible for family credit. That has the convenient consequence that it has increased the percentage take-up of family credit without its being necessary for one extra person to claim it. Overnight, the take-up figure has soared from 35 to 50 per cent.

The Secretary of State will recall that he announced those figures on 17 March. On 6 April, I asked whether he would deposit in the Library the working papers on which the revised figures were based. Last Monday, he told the House that the figures had been deposited in the Library. When I checked, I found that the papers had not yet been deposited. I pursued the matter and asked the right hon. Gentleman's office whether we could have the papers. I was told that arrangements would be made for a package to be sent to my office. When I opened the package, I discovered that it contained the market research carried out for the relaunch. It is singularly apt that, when we ask for the Government's statistical data, we are sent market research.

On Friday, I again asked where the working papers were. I was told that they had not been deposited in the

Library because they were not yet ready. These are the working papers on which a conclusion was apparently reached by the Secretary of State a month ago.

On my way to the Chamber today, I checked in the Library and discovered that three sheets dealing with the take-up of family credit had been deposited by the Department of Social Security this very afternoon. The Secretary of State will appreciate that I have not yet had time to go through the complex formulae. Of the three sheets, two deal with methodology and none provides the raw data. If the Secretary of State had those sheets in front of him when he announced the revised figures, he will know that the foundations for those revised figures look very shaky indeed.

Mr. Favell: Is the Labour party in favour of abolishing family credit and spreading benefit thinly among everyone entitled to child benefit? If so, surely the poor will suffer.

Mr. Cook: We are most certainly not in favour of abolishing family credit. We are most anxious that all the 470,000 who we were promised would get family credit should get it, for the good and simple reason that, as the hon. Gentleman would recall if he had attended the debates in 1985 and 1986, Ministers repeatedly promised that family credit would compensate families with children for cuts in housing benefit and the loss of entitlement to free school meals. Those families have suffered the cuts but a quarter of a million of them are not receiving the family credit which we were promised would provide the compensation. We very much hope that the campaign launched by the Secretary of State will succeed and that he will find the remaining quarter of a million, but in the meantime, given the Government's pathetic failure to match even their own target for the take-up of family credit, they cannot seriously argue that family credit is an adequate substitute for child benefit. After all, the increase in take-up was achieved without a single extra person claiming.

The net result of all this is that, in the past 18 months during which we have been debating the uprating of child benefit, the only thing that has happened to alter the debate one way or the other is that it has become absolutely clear, beyond argument, that family credit cannot possibly be paraded as a substitute for child benefit. Family credit goes to only one quarter of families —one twentieth of those who receive child benefit. Not only does child benefit go to many more families with children; it goes to many more families living in poverty. For a start, it goes to the 250,000 families who, even on the revised figures, are poor enough to qualify for family credit, but do not receive it. Each of those families gets child benefit and it is the only support that they have for their children.

4.45 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman referred to those in poverty. Does he have any recent data suggesting that, as we discovered some time ago, there is a remarkable number of women from quite wealthy families whose only income is child benefit? Their husbands pay the bills, the rates, and the butcher but they do not give them any money in their hands. Those women at least get child benefit.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) is absolutely right. During our previous debate I read to the House a moving letter from the wife of a man whose earnings were well above average who said that she depended on child benefit because it was the only income on which her husband could not get his hands. The hon. Lady has led us to the reasons why child benefit is so superior to family credit and why it is so important.

First, child benefit puts money in the hands of the mother. It redistributes purchasing power in favour of children because it goes to the parent who is most likely to be responsible for feeding and clothing the children. Secondly, it puts money in the hands of just about every mother. It has a take-up rate as close to 100 per cent. as one could hope to achieve.

Thirdly, child benefit does not fall as income increases. The Government persist in representing that feature of child benefit as its major weakness. In fact, it is its great strength. Child benefit represents an important ladder out of the poverty trap. It will be impossible for child benefit to fulfil its role as a ladder out of the poverty trap if the Government substitute for it a means-tested benefit confined to those who are already in the poverty trap.

There is a fourth reason why child benefit remains a correct and appropriate way—the best way—of combating poverty among children: it is reliable and consistent. It does not fluctuate with all the other exigencies that can affect families in our society.

The Secretary of State has referred to child benefit as a benefit of the past. That is an odd way to talk about a benefit that was introduced only a decade ago especially as, in one critical respect, child benefit is more relevant than ever. Child benefit provides a guaranteed income. It provides stability in mothers' budgets, in sharp contrast to the dramatic changes in their circumstances that have become commonplace in modern society.

The Government have created what they like to call a flexible labour market. By that they mean that many on the labour market are stuck in a revolving door—bouts of work alternating with bouts of unemployment. Child benefit provides a stable constant support in meeting the expenses connected with children and smooths the transitions that affect those 4 million households who move in and out of employment and part-time employment each year. The expenses incurred in feeding and clothing children do not vary according to whether the head of the household is in or out of work, receiving overtime or in reduced short-time work. That flexible labour market requires an inflexible, constant, reliable child benefit that matches the constant nature of expenses on children.

Let me come to the clearest reason why child benefit should be uprated. Child benefit, logically, might be better regarded not as a cash benefit but as a tax allowance. After all, it replaced a tax allowance. It is the only recognition in the benefits and tax system of the additional cost to the taxpayer who has children. The hon. Member for Lancaster referred to those apparently wealthy and comfortable households in which the father may fail to turn adequate income over to the mother.

There is another matter in relation to wealthy and comfortable households. Since the Government came to office, they have made it a point of pride annually to uprate tax allowances, frequently well in excess of the rate of inflation. When they do so, no Minister or Conservative Back Bencher complains about increases in such tax allowances on the basis that they apply indiscriminately to wealthy and comfortably off families—indeed, they

[Mr. Cook]

provide a marginal advantage which is even greater to wealthier families. I again ask the question that Opposition Members have put on the past three occasions on which the House debated child benefit and to which I have not yet received a reply: how can the Government come to a judgment which, in its order of priorities, decides that the married man's tax allowance should go up by 22 per cent. in real terms—that is what has happened over the past decade—while the value of child benefit has gone down by more than 12 per cent. over the same decade? By what extraordinary feat of mental gymnastics can Ministers persuade themselves that the cost of maintaining a wife has gone up by one fifth and that the cost of maintaining a child has gone down by one eighth? Where are the data to support such an extraordinary double standard? If they exist, could they also be deposited in the Library?

For all those reasons, Ministers are wrong to resist the uprating of child benefit. For all those reasons, I hope that Conservative Members will vote with us tonight, to press on the Government the case for uprating child benefit next April. I appreciate that the difficulty in their joining us in the Lobby is that they are not supposed to do so. They are supposed to support and stand by the party with which they were elected.

There is one obvious reason why Conservative Members should not feel that compunction on this issue. That reason is to be found in the manifesto on which all Conservative Members stood at the last general election. That manifesto contained a pledge that child benefit will continue to be paid as at present. There was no rider in that manifesto that it would continue to be paid as at present at a frozen level. *[Interruption.]* I heard an hon. Gentleman say that it has continued to be paid as at present. I should be interested to know whether, in his election address to his constituents at the last election, the hon. Gentleman spelt out that the manifesto meant that it would be a frozen child benefit at a single figure of £7·25. If the hon. Gentleman did state such a clear footnote in his election address, I assure him that I shall exculpate him from any need to vote with the Opposition tonight for the uprating of child benefit.

For all other Conservative Members who may not have put any such saving clause into their election addresses, any honest, simple and candid reading of their manifesto means that they should vote with us tonight and, next year, provide for an honest uprating of the benefit that goes to 7 million mothers and 12 million children.

Mr. Raison: The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) spoke trenchantly about new clause 1. I wish to speak about new clause 2, which would automatically index-link child benefit in the same way in which retirement and other benefits are automatically uprated each year. It will not apply in the current financial year. We accept that we are now too far into the new financial year for that to be possible. Nor does it make up for past failures to uprate child benefit—for the fact that child benefit has lost 12 per cent. of its value since it was introduced in 1979. As the hon. Gentleman said, that is in sharp contrast with income tax allowances which went up during that period.

We simply ask that, in future, the money that is already in the public expenditure projections for the uprating of child benefit should be used for that purpose. This year, the cost of uprating is estimated to be about £200 million. I repeat that it was allowed for in the present public expenditure projections, and it is allowed for in the public expenditure projections for next year. We do not even ask for new, additional money from the Government.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I have tried to put new clause 2 in terms which are as easy as possible for the Government. As I said, we are not insisting on anything this year. We are trying to establish the principle which was inherent in our manifesto commitment that there should be a regular uprating of child benefit, and that we will achieve the statutory status for it. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will accept our new clause. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I intend to vote for it.

Why do we feel so strongly about this matter? The hon. Member for Livingston was right to say that we should regard child benefit as a tax allowance rather than a benefit. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) has often made that point. There is no doubt that child benefit has descended from the historical tradition of tax relief for those with children. That tradition dates back to the late 18th century. There was a period during the 19th century when it was dropped, but it has had long standing in our history, and it would be wrong to forget that. In racehorse terms, the origin of child benefit is "by family allowance, out of child tax allowance."

People object that child benefit is not targeted. That is the principal objection that we are likely to hear from hon. Members who support the Government in this matter. However, tax relief on pensions, mortgages, and on married couples' and personal allowances is not targeted. The Government are proposing to introduce tax relief for health insurance for the over-60s. Again, there is no intention of targeting it. My right hon. Friend should state why we should treat child benefit selectively—that is clearly the direction in which we are moving—when many other major sources of support for large sections of our community are not selective or targeted.

Mr. Frank Field: Is not the right hon. Gentleman being unusually generous to the Minister? Those tax allowances are targeted. They are targeted in inverse proportion to people's needs. The richer one is, the higher one's rate of tax, and the more valuable are one's tax allowances.

Mr. Raison: That is true of mortgages and pensions.

Mr. Field: It is true of all of them.

Mr. Raison: Not all. Somebody receiving help with his pension in the form of tax relief gets more if he has a large pension. It seems to fly in the face of all reason that we should restrict child benefit on the basis of income. As I have already elicited from my right hon. Friend, his new and welcome measure on the abolition of the earnings rule is in no sense targeted. It will apply to everybody. Why should the Government pick out this form of help to a significant group in the population—the help which, through child benefit, goes to those with children?

Bearing in mind the lives of our constituents and what is going on in our country today, there is no doubt that the bringing up of children can entail significant costs. Of course, for most people it brings great pleasure and happiness—I do not want to play that down for one

minute—but it also brings great financial burdens. Those burdens fall on those who are just above the level of selective benefits—the not-quite-poor, as some hon. Members have called them. Conservative Members must remember that there are many people in this country whose incomes are just above the level of means-tested benefits, and they do not find life particularly easy financially. It would be a great error to think that such burdens do not hit them. The hon. Member for Livingston forcefully made the point that, to a great extent, the burden of bringing up children—not only the actual work but the financial cost—is borne by mothers and that child benefit is paid to mothers.

Those with a taste for history will recall the battles fought at the end of the war to establish family allowance, in which the great aunt of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) played such a heroic part. Other Conservative ladies such as Mrs. Cazalet Keir were also involved in those battles. They fought to establish the principle that the benefit should go to the person who really needed it—the mother. To forget that would be to fly in the face of a tradition long held within the Conservative party and widely shared by many important women's bodies outside the Conservative party. I understand that the majority of the Women's National Commission has come down in favour of uprating child benefit. The Save the Children Fund, the National Children's Bureau, Barnardo's, the Children's Society, the National Children's Home, family service units, family welfare associations and many others have joined us in the conviction that it is absolutely essential to uprate child benefit.

5 pm

We must accept that we are living in what in some ways is a radically changing social climate. There are things in that climate which make bringing up children more difficult than it has been. We are all aware from our constituency surgeries that there has been a rather tragic increase in the proportion of cases where a family breakdown is at the heart of the problem. We are all aware that there has been a substantial growth in the number of one-parent families in this country. Those people particularly need the certainty of child benefit. Today there is more pressure and more need for women to go out to work. That incurs certain costs, and an enlarged child benefit would provide a better way of helping those people than any other form of benefit. The certainty of child benefit is one of its most valuable features. People know that family benefit will come to them. It does not involve the delay that occurs when establishing a claim to selective benefit.

We must ask ourselves a profound question: do we want to see more and more people pushed into some kind of means-tested support? The community charge will be accompanied by a massive system of rebates. I believe that something like 10 million people will receive rebates under the community charge. The policies for rented housing will have the same kind of effect, and the number of people claiming housing benefit will clearly rise.

Obviously no one is against income support or family credit. It is absolutely right that we should recognise that child benefit cannot do the whole job. One would very much hope that if we can allow child benefit to grow in the way that the late Sir Brandon Rhys Williams advocated in his posthumously published pamphlet "Stepping-stones to Independence", and as the basis for a tax credit scheme, we can get to grips with a very difficult social problem in a way which has not been possible so far.

An advantage of child benefit is that it offers one of the biggest "Stepping-stones to Independence" to which Sir Brandon referred. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has often said that he wants to get us away from the dependency culture. I do not believe that scrubbing child benefit will do that. The dependency culture is expressed by the reliance on the means-tested benefits to which I have just referred. We are all aware of the great problems with the take-up of family credit and many of us will have seen the advertisements on television intended to encourage people to collect their family credit.

Another argument that the Government have often put forward is that child benefit does not help the really poor —those on family credit and income support. Perhaps it is true as things stand that if there is an increase in child benefit they will not receive its direct effect. However, as I understand it, there is nothing in the Social Security Act 1986 to prevent those on other benefits from receiving the full increase from child benefit. The fact that they do not receive the full increase is simply a reflection of the orders and regulations with which the Government implement the Social Security Act 1986. They could perfectly well say that we should put up child benefit to allow everyone to gain from it. Meanwhile we have to face the fact that the decision not to uprate child benefit this year has moved some 30,000 families with 60,000 children on to income-related benefits. Is that really the tendency that the Conservative party wants to support?

Some people say that child benefit should be taxed and, of course, that has attractions. Family allowances were taxed in days gone by. However, there is a technical problem today. The absolutely justified separation of a husband and wife's taxes, which will be introduced next year, will make it virtually impossible to tax child benefit. Who would we tax? Would we tax the husband who does not receive the benefit or the wife who receives it but whose income will normally be much lower? The latter policy would not be well received, although in many cases the wife might not reach the level to be liable to pay tax. Similarly, husbands would not be very enthusiastic about being taxed on a benefit which they do not receive. That would certainly be novel.

Another argument is that those paying the higher rate —40 per cent.—should perhaps not receive child benefit. I can see a case for that, but there are practical problems. I cannot help but think back to our debates on the community charge and the amendment in favour of a banded system and the vigour with which the Government claimed that it was completely impractical to have a system by which those on the 40 per cent. rate should pay a higher community charge because very often over 18 months or two years it was difficult to know exactly what level people were on. If that criticism applied for a banded community charge, it would apply with child benefit.

The practical and moral arguments point strongly in favour of continuing child benefit. We are talking about the possibility that the Government may decide between now and the next election to drop child benefit as part of our social security apparatus. That would be a disastrous policy.

We know that child benefit cannot be ended during this Parliament. I remind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that in 1985 a very comprehensive review of social

[Mr. Raison]

security came down firmly in favour of child benefit. I have a battery of quotes from my right hon. and hon. Friends in favour of child benefit and I will not embarrass them by quoting from them today. All sorts of groups firmly believe that child benefit is right and must be uprated. Those are not loony groups, but include bodies such as the women's institutes.

We know that child benefit can help to restrain inflationary wage pressure. After all, the existence of a large number of children is likely to cause working people to demand higher pay. If some of the burden of higher costs can be borne by child benefit, the pressure will be lessened.

As the hon. Member for Livingston has reminded us, child benefit helps to offset the poverty or employment trap. Above all, child benefit embodies the positive symbol of that active family policy to which the Conservative party is committed. That is a commitment to the job of raising children decently in a world where it is not always very easy to do that. However, that is only part of the job, and many other factors come into play. If we abandon child benefit we will turn our backs on a great tradition. If we keep child benefit but do not uprate it and simply allow it to wither on the vine, that will be almost as bad as abandoning it.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to accept new clause 2. If he cannot do that, I urge right hon. and hon. Members to support it in the Lobby.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I begin by apologising for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). He set out to be here for the proper time, but unhappily has not been able to enlist the co-operation of British Rail. He will join us as soon as he possibly can. Unfortunately, he is delayed on a train somewhere between London and the north.

I am a poor substitute for my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire in that I do not possess his detailed knowledge of the labyrinthine complexities of social security legislation. However, I feel that that may not be such an obstacle this evening. We are concerned more with a matter of principle than of complexity. The arguments for and against have been well rehearsed, but, if I may respectfully say so, it seems to me that those marshalled by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who opened the debate, were overwhelming in their quality.

It may help if I indicate briefly some of the reasons why I and my hon. Friends will be supporting whichever of the two new clauses is pushed to a vote. In the first place, as has been pointed out, child benefit was introduced to take the place of the old child tax allowances. Secondly, the combination of tax cuts in recent Budgets and the freezing of child benefit has resulted in money being taken from those with children and given to those without children. As has been pointed out, the level of child benefit has fallen by 12 per cent. in real terms since 1979, during which period the married man's tax allowance has increased by 22 per cent., and the single person's by 19 per cent., after taking account of statutory indexing.

Of course, the great majority of families affected by the level of child benefit fall neither into the category of the rich nor into the category of the poor. Indeed, many of those families will find the effect of a freeze to be very considerable—indeed, disproportionate. In these circumstances, it seems that the arguments in favour of uprating child benefit are overwhelming, not least because the permanence of the benefit, and the ease of access to it, undoubtedly help poorer families, many of whom have great problems, in the management of their finances. These people may be subject to great fluctuation in income and in circumstances, week by week.

It is easy to argue that one of the most significant features of child benefit is that it is paid direct to wives. There is a feeling among some of us that we may be intruding on private grief when we hear the debate among Tory Members as to what their manifesto actually said. I suspect that the capacity of the textual analyst really ought not to concern this debate. This is a debate about principle, and not about what was said, or is understood to have been said, in the Government's manifesto. There is little doubt that the vast majority of people in this country understood that the Government's proposals necessarily involved the uprating of child benefit year on year. It is for that reason, and because of the merits of the case for uprating, that my hon. Friends and I will certainly support whichever of the two new clauses is put to the vote.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): The debate on this subject has become something of an annual event, and some Members seem to make very much the same speech year after year. I am afraid that my speech will be no exception.

As the debate goes on, in its wider context, it is clear that my side of the argument is winning. While that may not be apparent in the present attendance in the House —I do not think that I have ever felt quite so outnumbered on my own Benches—outside the House, in the wider debate in the country among people who think about tax and social security policy, the Government are winning. Essentially, it boils down to an argument about means-tested benefit versus universal benefit.

Opening the debate, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made an eloquent plea for universal benefits. One knows that that is part of Socialist policy, and has been for a very long time. Of course, the other side of that case, about which the hon. Gentleman did not tell us, is that universal benefits mean higher rates of taxation. On the whole, I am in favour of lower taxation and means-tested benefits, and of paying the price of the kind of poverty trap that one ends up with, rather than of having high rates of taxation and universal benefits. I do not believe that it is the business of the Government to try to help people who are in a position to help themselves, but I do believe that it is the Government's job to help those who are not in a position to help themselves.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): In which case, could my hon. Friend tell the House whether he is or is not in favour of the old system of child tax allowance, because that allowed people to keep more of their own income?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend has intervened very early in my speech. I was going to come to the question of tax allowances, but, as he has raised it, I shall deal with it now. Paradoxically, if we had kept the system of child tax allowances, of which my hon. Friend is apparently in favour, their value would have fallen by one third since 1979. The reason is that taxes have been reduced from 35

to 25 per cent. The attraction of child tax allowances under the last Labour Government was based on the fact that the rates of income tax then were so high. If we had perpetuated that system, the value of those tax allowances would have fallen by about £90 in today's money.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Adopting the logic of my hon. Friend's argument against universal benefits and in favour of targeted, means-tested, benefits, how does he explain tax benefits for pensions, tax benefits in respect of married women's earned income, and the various untargeted global benefits that are paid freely to people with mortgages? By the logic of my hon. Friend's argument, those should also be withdrawn. According to what he says, we should means test those people directly and, thereby, reduce tax a great deal more.

5.15 pm

Mr. Maples: There is a good deal in what my hon. Friend says. It is an attractive argument. Indeed, in the past, I have argued that we should try to reduce rates and remove allowances and deductions. But there is a fundamental difference between not paying tax and receiving social security benefits, and anybody who does not realise that is missing a terribly important point in the debate. I do not believe that it is the job of the state to take money from people in tax and give it back to them in social security benefits.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maples: I wonder if I may be allowed to get a little further into my argument. I have dealt only with the first heading in my notes.

I was surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) should intervene to suggest that it was part of Conservative policy to regulate financial affairs between husbands and wives. That has certainly never been part of my notion of Conservative policy. In fact, I do not think that it is any business of the state either. I do not think that it is the business of the state to take money from working husbands and give it back to their wives.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maples: Perhaps the hon. Lady will allow me to finish this point.

In any case, there are two intervening transactions. The first concerns the cost of collecting the tax, which is generally 2 to 2·5 per cent. The other concerns the cost of administering child benefit. I do not know what its level is, but it is probably 1 or 2 per cent. In other words, probably between 4 per cent. and 5 per cent. is lost in the process of taking money out of the pockets of husbands and giving it back to their wives. I cannot see that that is part of Conservative philosophy or that it is any business of the state.

Mrs. Beckett: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. As I understand him, he is saying that the state should not take a view as to how income is shared, distributed and used within the family. Am I right, however, in thinking that he voted for non-dependant deduction in the case of housing benefit, which takes money from the family on the basis of a contribution of teenage children to housing costs?

Mr. Maples: I certainly did. There is a very powerful argument for that. If a teenager earns £70 a week, to assume that he is making no contribution to the family's rent is simply flying in the face of reality. He almost certainly is making such a contribution. But this is something totally different: taking money from the husband in tax and giving it back to his wife. As I see it, that is no business of the state.

Another general point that I think is missed here is that we are spending £4·5 billion of public money on the administration of this benefit—taking it in taxation, and giving it back to wives in the form of child benefit. The cost of administration and collection in the middle has to be borne. That is unfair, because very often it comes from people who do not have children and whose income is low, and goes to people who do have children and whose income is high. Increases do not benefit those on the lowest incomes. I believe—and this is perhaps a fundamental point—that it does not achieve its main objective.

An increase in child benefit would be of absolutely no help to families on income support or family credit. Family credit now applies a long way up the income scale. At 1988-89 rates, a family with two children under the age of 11 could have received family credit up to an income of £7,500 a year. In 1989-90 the income figure would be more than £8,000 a year. If those two children were 14 and 16, the family could have continued in 1988-89 to receive family credit up to an income level of £9,000 a year, which in 1989-90 money is £9,700. But a family with two children aged 14 and 16, earning below £9,700 a year, would not benefit by one penny piece from an increase in child benefit. That is a fundamental point.

Presumably those are the families whom we regard as needing help. Families trying to bring up children on incomes of £7,000, £8,000 or £9,000 a year certainly need help, and if there were any proposal to remove that help I should certainly vote against it. But what is proposed in the new clauses would be of absolutely no benefit to those families. Every penny they gained in increased child benefit would be lost either in income support or in family credit. It is of no use to people at the low end of the income scale whom we are supposed to be helping.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that for poorer families and even not-so-poor families, particularly if the wage earner is unemployed or ill, child benefit is relevant? It is not just a case of saying that it cannot benefit them. It can benefit people in those specific circumstances.

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend knows more about the workings of the social security system than I do, and he may be right. In effect, he is criticising the way family credit operates and if his criticism is valid, perhaps it should operate to provide a more regular stream of income. The non-indexation of child benefit has reduced it from £835 to £725. The £725 continues to be paid, so is a regular income.

I was saying that people on low incomes do not benefit from the increases. There is another side to that which presents paradoxes. It is that everybody else pays more in tax than they receive in child benefit. Anyone with two children who earns £7,100 a year pays income tax of £751 and receives child benefit of £754—£3 more. If we uprate that to this year's tax rates, the answer might be slightly

[Mr. Maples]

different. Anybody with one or two children who earns more than £7,100 pays more income tax than he receives in child benefit.

Is it the business of the state to organise that sort of transfer through the tax and social security system? I do not believe that it is. The way to help those people, if they need help, is through tax reductions. The consistent theme of the Government's tax policy is to reduce the basic rate of tax. That is untargeted and goes to everybody, but those on incomes who can afford to take care of children should do so. Whether or not they have children is a free choice. If their incomes are insufficient, the social security system should make it up. It is not for the tax and social security system to differentiate between people and to decide how they are taxed and how social security is spent when they can make those decisions themselves.

There are one or two other fundamental misunderstandings about child benefit. Forty per cent. of the recipients of child benefit have incomes in excess of £15,000 a year—substantially above the national average. A further paradox is that people on low incomes without children are subsidising people on high incomes with children. Why should a single shop assistant earning £100 a week pay tax to subsidise someone earning £20,000 a year? I cannot see that that is fair in any way.

Another point that is lost sight of is that the world has come a long way since 1979. People's disposable income has risen substantially. We know that the income of someone on average earnings has risen by 29 per cent., but that percentage is not usually translated into pounds per week. Somebody on average earnings is, in today's money, £46 a week better off than 10 years ago. Somebody on three quarters of average earnings is £34 a week better off and someone on half of average earnings is £22 a week better off.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maples: I shall finish this point. Against that we are setting a non-indexation of child benefit of just over £1 a week. People at all levels of earnings—I agree that there is a different set of criteria for people out of work—are considerably better off in terms of take-home pay and disposable income than they were 10 years ago.

When people have such increases in their disposable income the necessity for the state to provide for them is demonstrably diminished. It is right that we should expect people to use part of the increase in their disposable income to pay for items which perhaps 10 or 15 years ago they could not afford and which it was right for the state to help them with. To suggest that there is some moral compulsion on the Government to pay an extra £1·10 a week per child to somebody whose disposable income has risen by £34 a week during the past 10 years is difficult to swallow.

We are taking about increases in disposable incomes at low levels of earnings. In 1988-89 half of average earnings was £130 a week gross. The increase in the disposable element of that is £22 a week, so on earnings well below the family credit ceiling people have had increases of £20 to £30 a week in their disposable income. That sets in a much more realistic context the non-indexation of child benefit which amounts to £1·10 a week. Put in that context the sum is insignificant.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his generosity. If I may say so, he is playing games with statistics. He is talking about disposable incomes and he said that 40 per cent. of recipients of child benefit are on incomes of £15,000 a year. Let us look at disposable income. Can my hon. Friend tell the House what the disposable income is, after mortgage payments, of his constituents who are earning between £15,000 and £20,000 a year? He will find that it is not very great.

Mr. Maples: I am reluctant to take issue in such sharp terms with a good and hon. Friend. If he thinks that it is the business of our tax and social security system to funnel taxpayers' money to people earning more than £15,000 a year, I am amazed. Last year average earnings were £13,200 a year, so we are talking about people on 120 per cent. of average earnings. We cannot help people who earn more than the average. It is arithmetically impossible. We cannot take money from everybody and give back more to everybody. All we can do is take money from people earning more than the average and give it to people earning less than the average. Even the hon. Member for Livingston would not go further than to suggest that he could make everybody equal. He certainly could not improve everybody's lot.

The crux of my argument is the need for a means-tested system which is generous and operates reasonably and sensibly to help people who cannot afford to bring up children on their income. Family credit goes a long way up the income scale. In this tax year it will go to nearly £10,000 a year of pre-tax income for those with two children aged 14 and 16. That is about 70 per cent. of average earnings, which is about what average male manual earnings have been for a long time. A system that goes to that level is reasonably generous. Clearly, it could be more generous. If it is suggested that means-tested benefits should go further up the income scale than 70 per cent. of average earnings, we are getting into dangerous territory. It is almost what my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) was suggesting: to help everybody, above and below average earnings. Obviously we cannot do that. There is no point going beyond whatever average earnings happen to be.

A means-tested system that pays benefits to people earning £10,000 a year with two children is reasonably generous. I understand that the average payment to recipients of family credit is about £25 a week. Sixty per cent. of recipients—nearly two thirds—receive benefit of more than £20 a week. There must be a withdrawal rate and I understand that that is the criticism of the system. The trade-off between universal and means-tested benefits is that a means-tested benefit must have a withdrawal rate. To compare means-tested benefits with the hightest rate of tax is a fallacy because they are not the same. To receive benefit at the expense of other taxpayers, which is withdrawn as one gets better off, is fundamentally different from paying more money in income tax as one earns more money. One is a benefit and the other is a liability where people are paying tax. It is axiomatic that we cannot have a means-tested benefits system that does not have a withdrawal rate or, what would be worse, some sort of precipice-type cut-off.

The social security system reforms of the past two or three years mean that means-tested benefits are now based on after-tax income. In retrospect that is an incredibly simple and obvious reform. It escapes me why none of us

came to that conclusion before. It has made a fundamental difference as the rates of withdrawal can never exceed 100 per cent. I realise, however, that once one adds together housing benefit and family credit one can achieve high rates of withdrawal. It would be nice to be able to make those more moderate, but the only way of doing that would be to extend the benefit even further up the income scale to those earning more than the 70 per cent. of average earnings.

5.30 pm

My right hon. Friend the Minister is obviously in a much better position than I am to respond to the specific criticisms of the hon. Member for Livingston about the statistics for take-up. The take-up rate is usualy quoted in terms of the percentage of eligible individuals taking up benefit. Some of those are entitled to very small amounts of benefit. The percentage of the eligible money that is taken up is much higher. I believe that I am right in saying that about 65 per cent. of the money available is being taken up, while it is taken up by only 50 per cent. of the individuals. That appears to show that those who are not taking up benefit are those who, on the whole, are entitled to relatively small payments and have relatively low entitlements.

However, those who are entitled to relatively large payments under the family credit system are taking up their entitlements. I welcome my right hon. Friend's efforts to encourage more people to take up family credit. I do not believe that any stigma should be attached to it. I do not accept that there is some sort of stigma attached to family credit that is not attached to child benefit because one does not have to ask for child benefit. There is no stigma, because, for example, employees can have family credit paid through their wage packets. One does not have to obtain a Department of Social Security book and collect it from the Post Office every week. I hope that more people will take up family credit because it is far more effective than uprating child benefit in helping people who need help.

We have a crazy system of redistributing £4·5 billion —some 1 per cent. of our GDP—by recycling it through the tax and social security system. We have a system where those in real need—those on family credit or income support—would not be helped by either of the new clauses or by any uprating of child benefit. We should continue to move, as I believe we are, to a system of letting people who are able to look after themselves do so. The state should not be an unwelcome intervener in their financial affairs.

I do not believe that anyone coming down from Mars today, who was asked to deal with the difficulties of low-income families bringing up children, would reinvent the child benefit system. I find my second proposition even harder to believe than my first, which is that the cost of uprating the child benefit by £1·10—which has been under-indexed—would be in excess of £600 million a year. If the Government said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) or the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), "We have £600 million this year to spend on helping families with low incomes to bring up children", I do not believe that they would choose to scatter that money by paying £1·10 per week for each child. They would choose to target it. They do not like the word, but, if they were presented with the money and the option, that would be their choice.

I say to some of my right hon. and hon. Friends that I hope that they will take account of the way in which the world has moved on in the past 10 years and the extent to which disposable incomes have risen substantially at all income levels. It is time that we stopped taxing middle-income people so that we can give them benefits. We should continue with the system of giving tax cuts to those who are capable of looking after their own affairs and giving generous help, through the social security system, to those who are not.

Mr. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Having listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples), I feel depressed. If that is the attitude of Tory Members I certainly do not hold out any hope that either of the two new clauses will be passed. The hon. Gentleman's attitude reflects his lack of any real-life experience of bringing up a family on low income. I was also deeply shocked by his complete lack of understanding about the position in which many women find themselves. The hon. Gentleman would not give way to an Opposition Member, possibly because he knew that we would point that out. There was an absolute lack of understanding of the fact that the majority of children are brought up in a family by the mother. Even in families of middle incomes, husbands often do not pass their incomes to the women. My husband worked very hard, but he was still not well paid, so I have experience of bringing up children on a low income. I am possibly one of the minority who can pass on experience of the fact that that income in the middle of the week—I drew it on a Tuesday—was a lifeline. When one is on a small income, if one needs an extra pair of shoes, is running out of food or has a bill coming in, child benefit is useful. The hon. Gentleman's lack of understanding of how an awful lot of people budget and manage their incomes beggars belief.

Late in the 1980s the Child Poverty Action Group carried out a survey that showed that one in five children lived on or below the poverty line. I found that a distressing survey and I felt deeply ashamed that I lived in a wealthy country which could produce such statistics. After that survey, all informed opinion pointed out that the freezing of child benefit would make the position for many children considerably worse.

I believe that it is worth emphasising the values of child benefit over and over again, and I hope that my hon. Friends will do the same. The money goes to the mother. The take-up rate is 98 per cent. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West did not put forward any argument to diminish the importance that people in receipt of child benefit place upon it. It does not affect the poverty trap and it is cheap to administer. The mother knows the value of child benefit, because often it is her only income.

I hope that common sense, compassion and care will prevail in this short debate on child benefit. Looking at the suits around me and considering the lack of any kind of experience of most hon. Members, I do not feel too positive about the outcome of the debate. If the Government persist in freezing over and over again what is a universally accepted valuable benefit, with the intention of allowing it to wither on the vine, they will go down in history as the Government who took us back to the Dickensian state of the 19th century and before, when we had ragged children as the norm rather than the exception. I hope that hon. Members will vote for the new clauses.

Sir Ian Gilmour (Chesham and Amersham): I wish to speak in support of new clause 2. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) made his argument so effectively, I shall not need to detain the House for long.

As the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said, child benefit has a number of considerable advantages and has a 98 per cent. take-up. It is paid to the women, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) objected. He did not give much reason for that. It seemed just neo liberal dogma that the state should not do such things. The fact is that the overwhelming majority prefer it paid in that way. Until recently, if not still, the Conservative women's organisation was in favour of such method of payment. I do not believe that some sort of dogma about what the state should or should not do should interfere with what most people want and what many people believe is sensible and right. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury said, it loosens up the poverty and unemployment traps, and it is fair. Since the days of William Pitt, it has been generally realised that it is more expensive to have children than not. If William Pitt had been here this afternoon and heard my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West, he would have thought that he was the man from Mars and would have rubbed his eyes and ears with astonishment at what my hon. Friend said.

Against the formidable arguments in favour of child benefit the Government have two. One is that it costs a lot of money, and the second is that benefits should be targeted, but, in fact, it does not cost a lot. It is worth comparing child benefit with expenditure on other allowances. Child benefit costs £4·5 billion, the single person's income tax allowance costs £9 billion, the married man's income tax allowance costs £14 billion, the wife's earned income allowance costs £3·5 billion, the mortgage interest rate relief costs £6·5 billion and private pensions cost £10 billion. Against all those figures I do not believe that £4·5 billion for children is excessive. Furthermore, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury has said, child benefit is the only benefit that the Government and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West favour targeting. All the other benefits are universal, so why should the Government and my hon. Friend pick on children? Why should they be the first to go to the wall? Therefore, the Government's first argument is not right. Child benefit is not relatively expensive.

The Government's second argument is that it is more important to give money to the really poor, but there are several answers to that argument. As I understand it, only one third of the money that is saved by not uprating child benefit is going to the really poor this year; the remaining two thirds is not being paid out. Even if the Government's argument was right, why should money for the really poor be paid at the expense of other families with children? Above all, why should it be paid at the expense of the nearly poor? If the Government feel the need to help the really poor—I am glad that they do—why should not that money come out of general taxation rather than from child benefit?

It is well known that targeting does not work. I welcome my right hon. Friend's new campaign—or relaunch—and I hope that it will be successful. The figures suggest that things are getting better, but no one pretends that there will be anything like such a big take-up of the new benefits as there is of child benefit.

It is slightly misleading to say that child benefit does not help the really poor or that, conversely, not putting it up does not hurt them. That is a source of argument between my hon. Friend the Minister of State and myself. During our previous debate on this subject I said that, by not putting up child benefit, the Government would hit

"some of the least well-off people".

When my hon. Friend wound up the debate he said:

"It is not true that, by not uprating child benefit, we shall hit the least well-off."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1989; Vol. 145, c. 365, 384.]

I wrote to my hon. Friend after that debate to point out that I believed that he had misled the House, inadvertently of course, and that he had got it wrong. He wrote me a letter back of, I am sure he would agree, remarkable ambiguity and obfuscation. I wrote two more letters to my hon. Friend, but he did not reply; he is a busy man. It is, however, worth analysing what he said, not because he misquoted me—that happens to all of us, but my hon. Friend could have admitted it—but because I had said that "some" of the least well off would be hit, while he said that it was not true that the Government would hit the least well-off. It is true, however, that not uprating hits some of the least well off.

My hon. Friend's answer was based on at least three false assumptions. First, because of the take-up of the means-tested benefits some of the least well-off do not take up the benefits and therefore they are hit by child benefit not being uprated. Secondly, entitlement is too restricted and there is too much red tape on means-tested benefit.

Recently someone wrote to me whose husband is a theatre technician without regular work. The family is ineligible for family credit because the work is too irregular and is ineligible for income support because of the earnings rule. Those people are hit, and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West should bear such cases in mind. As a result of that letter I tabled a question and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State admitted that there were a number of people in such circumstances.

The second assumption is that means-tested benefit, if it is claimed, will go where it is meant to go. That is true of family credit, but that is not necessarily true of income support. That benefit may stick with the husband and never reach the wife. The third assumption, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) has drawn attention, is that money is all that matters. Security, however, is equally important. The great advantage of child benefit is that the recipient knows that she will get it, but that is not the case of people who zoom in and out of eligibility for means-tested benefits.

Apart from all the other disadvantages of not uprating child benefit, it is clear that the Government have hit some of the least well-off by their actions. That is why I deeply regret their actions of the past two years, which I believe have been shameful.

Children in Britain from two-parent families are more likely to be poor than similar children in any other comparable country. That is not true of children from a one-parent family, which I welcome, but the first fact is shameful. The Government should deal with it straight away. At the very least they should accept new clause 2, and after that I hope that they will make up for the upratings that they have missed in previous years.

5.45 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The last time we debated this issue was 18 January. At that time the Secretary of State tried to convince the House that child benefit went to too many people who did not really need it. That was the core of his defence for arguing that it needed to be targeted. No doubt I have anticipated the right hon. Gentleman's reply to this debate. In January he came out with the rather surprising assertion:

"Conservative Members have pointed out many times in the past that 70 per cent. of the families who stand to gain from child benefit have incomes above average earnings."

That statement was echoed today because of the emphasis given to average earnings. We should handle the computation by average earnings extremely carefully.

As the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) said, it is not commonly known that the average earnings figure in January, when we last debated this issue, was £258 per week. Many of the people that I represent get nowhere near that figure as part of their weekly income. I look somewhat askance at the idea that they are somehow pulled into the average.

In today's edition of the *Financial Times* an article reminds us that the wages of Britain's managers have gone up substantially. Surely such increases pull up average earnings without necessarily suggesting that those earning below that figure have had any increase in wages. Such people's income could be decreasing, although those at the top find that their incomes are increasing. That is the difficulty of computation by average.

As a result of the Secretary of State's claim that

"70 per cent. of the families who stand to gain from child benefit have incomes above average earnings"—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1989; Vol. 145, c. 361.]

I tabled a question asking him to spell out exactly who are the 70 per cent. who receive the benefit. That percentage is a striking figure as it suggests that many people are on above-average wages, especially as the benefit is given to those with families. The reply I received modified the earlier statement as it said that the 70 per cent. mentioned did not include those on means-tested benefits.

I went to the statistical section of the Library and asked it if it could help me with the 70 per cent. figure. On its computation it found that 48 per cent. of potential recipients have above average earnings. It also said that even if those 1·5 million families who are so poor that they claim means-tested benefits were taken out of the calculations, at best only 60 per cent. were on above average wages.

The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) intervened earlier to say that gains represent the favourite figures. I believe that the quality of the official information available to the House and to the country is crucial when we are making decisions about the benefit and taxation system. Such information means that people are plain about where they stand.

It seems to me, to give it the best interpretation possible, that the Secretary of State has really tried to create the impression that those who receive the child benefit do not really need it because they are doing so well, yet when we consider the individual incomes of people we can see that that is manifestly not the case. What I am saying has been graphically demonstrated already by the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison). This Government occasionally apparently operate on the principle that the truth is a matter of presentation rather than of facts or information. Sometimes we receive a form of statistical fiction that reduces people to and computes them as an average rather than relating to their real circumstances and the incomes on which they have to live.

In fact, the element of child benefit is absolutely vital to the income support of the poorest section of the population. The failure to uprate the child benefit actually pushes poor people into means-tested poverty. I asked a question about how many more people would be pushed into needing means-tested benefit because the child benefit was not upgraded. The Minister replied that there was an estimated increase in those claiming family credit, as a result of not uprating child benefit, of between 20,000 and 25,000 families, so that about 80,000 people in our society are affected. If the effect of the shift from child benefit to family credit is interpreted in the amounts of money that the Department of Social Security is actually paying out, also revealed is the fact that a reduced sum is paid out by the Department to those on the lowest income, be they on family credit or child benefit, or a combination of both.

I asked the Secretary of State how much extra spending on family credit was attributable to the freeze in child benefit. He replied that when the 1989 uprating was announced it was estimated that the total cost of the family credit uprating would be £128 million, of which £23 million was directly attributable to the 45p added to the child benefit rates as compensation for the child benefit standstill. By parliamentary question, I pressed the matter further by asking what would have been the cost last year of uprating child benefit in line with earnings. The reply was that it would have been £260 million for the financial year 1988-89, net of savings on other benefits.

From that answer it is clear that the amount saved by the failure to uprate was 10 times the amount offered back in the assistance to family credit. It does not take a mathematical genius to deduce that a large sum has been taken out of the system of income support to the poorest people, either through the family credit system or child benefit. The scale of the cut in income as a result of freezing the child benefit has meant real hardship for families.

It is worth reminding the Minister that, for those who receive the lowest 10 per cent. of income, one fifth of that income is child benefit. Since that benefit has, in effect, been cut four times since 1979, it is also true that the overall level of benefits has been reducing.

Although some Conservative Members say that the problem is solved by tax cuts, they do not acknowledge that many people now receive such low pay that they do not pay tax, being totally dependent on the benefit system. In that sense, tax cuts cannot redistribute income in the way that Labour Members like to see happen. It is surprising to hear some Conservative Members say that the Government should not even be involved in the principle of redistributing income. We should remember that the number of families living in poverty in what still is a relatively wealthy country is a reflection of the Government's policies.

Other hon. Members have given positive reasons to support the payment of child benefit: it is more efficient to administer as a universal benefit; its rate of take-up is very high; the payment of the benefit is prompt, reliable and regular; it is paid to the mother; and people know where they are with their income from week to week. Child benefit is a vital form of regular income support to the poorest; it is a major element in family budgeting.

[Mr. John Battle]

An issue that still hangs over from previous debates, haunting them, as it haunts this debate, is the quality of the official information given in the debates and in answer to our questions. The Government continue to misrepresent the facts so that they can make cuts in social security spending. It should be said in this House and outside that the price of such reductions is paid by the poorest members of our society.

The Secretary of State for Social Security has assured us previously that he does not intend to let child benefit wither away by never uprating it again, but he must prove what he says. It is up to him to demonstrate that he will not let it wither away. One way in which he could do that would be to accept the new clauses.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (Norfolk, South-West): The aim of both new clauses is to commit the Government now to uprating child benefit in line with inflation and to be effective from April 1990. The aim is seductive in its limitation and obviously chosen for that purpose, but I believe that it should be resisted. Changing circumstances have benefited the vast majority of people in work in this country, particularly the increase in prosperity of the average working man over the past 10 years. Significant tax cuts have also contributed, with improved employment prospects for many people in large areas of the country. This situation surely means that the Government should review child benefit, as they are statutorily committed to do, and not have the outcome of that review pre-empted, as the new clauses seek to do.

I believe that such an aim was held when child benefits were first introduced. When she was Secretary of State for Social Services, Barbara Castle said that the benefit was a tax-free supplement and therefore not a major means of support to families whose major source of income was earnings. She said that indexation was inappropriate, and that she thought Parliament would wish to be flexible about the emphasis it put on different factors of family support in future. In other words, the aim when the benefit was introduced was that it should be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances, and that is what the Government are committed to doing.

Sir Ian Gilmour: That may be what the Government said at the time, but is my hon. Friend also aware that the then Conservative Opposition were in favour of upgrading the benefit twice a year?

Mrs. Shephard: My right hon. Friend would know much more about that than I. It has certainly been the consistent aim of this Government's social security policies that the benefit should go to those in the greatest need. I maintain that, by definition, that aim cannot be fulfilled by the universality of child benefit. It seems curious that anybody purporting to argue for fairness, justice and an equitable use of taxpayers' money could possibly support a benefit which pays nearly £1 billion to 1·25 million families earning £20,000 or more a year. Yet the benefit does not provide anything to people on family credit and income support.

Mr. Marlow: As my hon. Friend is aware, child benefit partly replaced the child tax allowance. Would my hon. Friend like to see the child tax return? That would probably satisfy some of the concerns.

Mrs. Shephard: I am arguing that the Government should review their policy of uprating at the appropriate time, which is next autumn, in the light of the circumstances pertaining then, and in line with the original intention. I am not, as my hon. Friend appears to be, arguing for a thorough-going change of the system.

6 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Lady started her speech by saying that the average income has risen over the past 10 years, as it has. If we are to review what social security payments should be made, should we not also remind ourselves that the gap between the most well-paid and the least well-paid has increased substantially in the same 10 years? Therefore, the relative benefit to the poorest of a fixed rate benefit such as child benefit is much more substantial and much more needed now than it was 10 years ago.

Mrs. Shephard: The system of family credit and income support, targeted as it is, is much more effective in helping people at the bottom of the income scale than a universal benefit such as child benefit.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Surely the argument against income support is that its take-up rate is only 40 per cent., whereas a universal benefit reaches 100 per cent.

Mrs. Shephard: I am going on to tackle that point. The hon. Lady is right to point out that the take-up of family credit has perhaps been disappointing, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last week announced both a thorough-going publicity campaign to bring family credit to the notice of all those who might benefit from it and, much more significantly, a simpler form on which to make the claim. The original form was difficult to understand and use. The combination of these two initiatives will increase the take-up significantly.

The combination of the changing circumstances that I have outlined and the effective and vigorous campaign now mounted by the Government over the take-up of family credit gives credibility to the Government in their aim to review the situation in the autumn. It will then be possible to make a judgment about the changing circumstances and about the effectiveness of the take-up of family credit. I support that aim; and these new clauses, which would pre-empt that review, should be resisted.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I shall endeavour to be brief and I shall not follow the line adopted by many others of going through a series of complex statistics, because I feel that many of them have not added to the debate but have rather detracted from the basic principles that underpin our comments and the way in which we vote. My hon. Friends in the Scottish Nationalist party and Plaid Cymru will be supporting both the new clauses.

Targeting tends to dominate our debates on social security payments and how we allocate benefits. One of the tragedies is that, basically, no one disagrees with the concept of targeting benefit on to the people who most need it. However, the problem is that targeting has failed miserably. It can be effective only if we have a much more progressive taxation system. Comparing this debate with what happened in the Budgets last year and this year shows that the Government are bringing in a regressive taxation system that benefits the rich and penalises the poor. Until we can have a progressive taxation system, we

have to look to the continuation of universal benefits to ensure that benefits reach those on the lower incomes who most desperately need the assistance that we can give them.

In my intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) I said that family credit has a take-up level of only 40 per cent. It is all very well for the Government to argue that there is now a massive advertising campaign to encourage people to take up this benefit, but it has been in existence for some time, and there are many reasons why people do not pursue it. One of the main reasons is that it is means tested and people have to go through a complex procedure to obtain it. All the monitoring of how the family credit system is working shows that the means-testing aspect is one of the key reasons for the low take-up.

I have no faith that the advertising campaign will have the impact that hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West suggested. If she believes that there should be additional assistance to people in the lower income groups, she should be supporting the new clauses, if for no other reason than that the Government should take account of the reality in which so many of our constituents live.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) said that there is no moral compulsion on the Government to increase child benefit. However, I believe that there is, not least because the Government made it clear in their manifesto that they intended to continue to pay child benefit. While we may go into the niceties of their language, those of us who read the manifesto understood it to mean a regular uprating of child benefit. That commitment was widely welcomed. The other moral compulsion is that the Tory party claims to be the party that supports families. The continuation and uprating of child benefit is a major aspect of supporting family life in the United Kingdom.

I support the arguments advanced by the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison). He referred to the community charge rebate system and to the fact that the Government anticipate that a large number of people in the poorer income groups will be eligible for such a rebate. It is well seen that he does not represent a Scottish constituency because those of us who do know that many of the poorest families, irrespective of the fact that they may have had the largest rebate made available to them on the community charge, are worse off than they ever were. For many of the families this is compounded by the freezing of child benefit. More and more of them are forced into the poverty trap by a whole series of measures introduced by the Government.

Women Members of Parliament should speak not only for their constituents but for women throughout the whole of the United Kingdom when arguing for the uprating of this benefit. One of the sadnesses of my life is that I am not a mother, but I do not begrudge paying my tax if it will be targeted on children. I come from a happy family home. We had to budget carefully and tightly. I remember how important the family allowance was to my parents, who ensured that my brother and I had the opportunities that they wanted for us. If having 41 women Members of Parliament is a major advance for women, all 41 of us should be in the same Lobby tonight, fighting for the women of the United Kingdom to ensure that they have the opportunity to bring up their children on the level of income that we would wish them to have. Therefore, I urge all women Members of Parliament to support these new clauses.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), who was advocating action within this House, by her party, for the benefit of this nation as a whole. I hope that we hear many more arguments from that corner of that Bench on that subject along that theme.

I support my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) who spoke to new clause 2 admirably. I remind my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) of the way in which, only in 1975, child benefit was introduced with all-party support. It was welcomed as an implementation of the requirement

"to make relief in cases where there are a number of children a matter of right and a matter of honour."

That was stated categorically by William Pitt 200 years ago, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) pointed out. Conservative Members have welcomed child benefit, particularly as a partial implementation of the Conservative Government's Green Paper initiative for a full tax credit scheme, which grew out of some of the thinking and studies of my late hon. Friend, Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, who contributed so much to arguments in this sphere and who we miss most particularly today. My right hon. and hon. Friends argued in favour of the inclusion of child benefit in annual uprating reviews so that it would at least be kept in line with inflation.

Child benefit replaced child tax allowance, which replaced the family allowance. If child tax allowance had continued, it is inconceivable that it would not have been increased as other tax allowances have increased. The same argument applies to child benefit.

Much of the discussion this afternoon has centred on the pros and cons of means testing and targeting, as with family credit, versus universality, as with child benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West made a careful analysis of that, and the thrust of his argument was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard).

I shall make five points which cut through to the truth. I hope to puncture some of the misleading statements that have been made and, with all due deference to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West, the misleading claims that he made.

First, it is misleading to claim that richer people gain a greater reward from universal child benefit. Child benefit is a cost to middle and high income earners without children. It is a benefit to middle and low income families with children and it does not make much difference to richer families with two or three children, or to poorer familes without children. The only real anomaly lies with richer families with four or more children but, for heaven's sake, it must be better to use overall taxation policy to establish tax takes from them than to do away with child benefit for all.

Secondly, as right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, universal benefits are far cheaper to administer than family credit, which, I understand, still costs £3·80 for each £100 of benefit, compared with £1·40 for basic retirement income or £1·90

[Mr. Tim Rathbone]

for child benefit. Moreover, that cost does not include the extraordinary, but welcome, £7 million promotion cost for family credit, which is not needed for child benefit.

Thirdly, targeting is surely a means of getting benefit to those who need it, not just aiming them in the right direction. Child benefit has a 98 per cent. take-up. In other words, it does not arrive with 2 per cent. of people who should get it, but we do not know where that 2 per cent. falls. Family credit reaches only 50 per cent. of eligible employees—253,000 people—and 24,000 or so self-employed people. That means that 253,000 employees' families and an unknown number of self-employed people who should be getting it are not. That is a translation of percentages into people, and the picture is quite horrific.

Fourthly, means-tested benefits create poverty traps, disincentives to work and incentives to dependency, and they erode pride and independence. Universal benefits do not, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham ably demonstrated. They are also more secure sources of income in the hands of the people who need it most—the parents of the child.

Fifthly, universality is valuable per se because it is a mark of a civilised society. It applies to Government services, whether they be street lighting or the police, and it applies to many Government benefits such as pensions. Why should it not apply in the same civilised way to benefits for children?

6.15 pm

In the absence of a better, more benign, more efficient and more effective form of family assistance, child benefit should be uprated in line with inflation and linked to tax allowances not frozen to death.

The last remaining question has to be, "Can the country afford it?" Although it is included in the public expenditure projections, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury said, that question has still to be answered. Whatever the cost, it is not a fresh burden. Rather, it is a transfer of purchasing power from people who, because of their larger income or smaller families, can afford luxuries to those who, because of their family size and circumstances, may go short of basic necessities.

To some extent, child benefit involves a redistribution of wealth—but only in a small way—both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the redistribution is between the better off and the less well off; horizontally, the redistribution is between people on each level of income according to whether they have children to support.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My hon. Friend talks of redistribution through child benefit. Does he accept that 500,000 recipients of the benefit pay tax at 40 per cent.? What is redistributive about people on a lower income paying tax to finance higher child benefit?

Mr. Rathbone: If my hon. Friend reads *Hansard*, he will see that I touched on that earlier in my speech.

The point that I have just been making was made by my great aunt, Eleanor Rathbone, who was the hon. Member for the Combined English Universities 55 years ago. We were reminded of that truth 15 months ago by our much revered late colleague Sir Brandon Rhys Williams. Child benefit is part of a consistent Conservative policy towards families of which we as a party and the Prime Minister and all of the Cabinet can justifiably be proud.

The country has responded, and wants to continue to respond, to bold and generous leadership. Where can that be truer than in maintaining and developing the wellbeing of our greatest asset—our children? There is no better investment. There is no greater reward. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to accept new clause 2. If they do not, I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to support it in the Lobby so that child benefit can again be the properly valued investment that, in present circumstances, only it can be.

Mr. Frank Field: I support new clauses 1 and 2. It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) and, in a sense, his great aunt and the arguments that hon. Members on both sides of the House have presented in favour of increasing child benefit.

I have no intention of taking the time of the House by going over ground that has already been covered. Others have ably made the case for the new clauses. For two reasons I want to pick up on something that the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) said. First, he introduced a new note into our debate. If Eleanor Rathbone were here today, or if we could have a seance with her, she would say that we should be taking note of that change.

The debate is moving, and was neatly summarised by the hon. Member for Lewes. Those of us who support child benefit have to take into account the new element of rising living standards, and decide whether they have risen to such a degree that the proponents of a universal benefit have to re-think their position. I hope that no Opposition Members will deny the rise in living standards. It is why the Government win elections. People do not elect Ministers because they are better looking or more able than Labour Front Bench Members—as a group they are not. They elect them because the majority of people realise that the trough that is put before them is bigger than it was before and they are worried that if we touched down on the Treasury Bench that trough would either shrink or be removed entirely. Our case against the Government is that, at a time of record living standards since the industrial revolution, one group has been deliberately excluded and we cannot support the emergence of an underclass without conceding what the electorate has known for three elections—that living standards have been rising at a record pace. Therefore, we have to take on board that new element.

I shall address the dilemma by answering the question that the hon. Member for Lewisham, West asked the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison)—if we had £600 million, would we put it towards a universal increase in child benefit to make up the shortfall that has occurred under the present Government? I would do that without any hesitation but perhaps for different reasons than have been put forward so far.

I would fit a big increase in child benefit into a policy of taxation and incentives for those at the bottom of society as well as for those at the top. Despite the Government's rhetoric about freedom, and despite what the Prime Minister says about disengaging from the nanny state, she runs an enormous nanny state. Our tax system bribes people to undertake certain forms of expenditure to such a degree that half all personal income is exempted from taxation by way of tax allowances. I want the Labour party to be committed to a policy of phasing out all those tax allowances and introducing a standard rate of taxation

of between 12p and 15p in the pound. That policy would entail some losers. Child benefit has a crucial role to play, as one of the groups that will lose out will be low-paid workers with children. Such a taxation system would get rid of the nanny state that the Prime Minister supports so firmly, but if we are so keen on cutting tax rates at every level, there have to be some measures of compensation. It would not be a burden, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, West was suggesting, because such a reduction in taxation together with a significant increase in child benefit would be building floors—creating a society in which people could build through their own efforts without being penalised.

Maybe not in our minds, but in the minds of most of our constituents, there is a difference between claiming a benefit but losing it as one's income rises and paying tax. People make that distinction, but it is not the relevant point. Most of our constituents are also aware that the overlap between taxes and benefits creates major disincentives for those at the bottom of the scale. If we are keen on creating incentives for those at the bottom, as we have been for those at the top, we need a massive increase in child benefit accompanying other major reductions in taxation which will not benefit one penny those who are poorest. It would be foolish and deceitful for Opposition Members to claim that we can move people away from dependency on welfare without going through a very difficult, choppy and unpopular period. The only way in which we can lift people free of means-tested assistance is to phase out the benefits and provide no help whatsoever —in other words, punish—or to increase universal provision such as child benefit. Those who are claiming means-tested assistance would lose that benefit as we increase child benefit. That would be unpopular, but if we are ever to get millions of low-income families out of the nightmare of dependency on state welfare, we have to go through that phase.

My view is very simple. I do not think that the hon. Member for Lewisham, West was right to say that he is winning the argument in the Chamber. He is losing the argument in the Chamber, but he may win the vote. If he wins the vote tonight, Opposition Members and Conservative Members who are friends of child benefit must face reality—the Secretary of State cannot stand up and tell us that he is opposed to child benefit and that only over his dead body will there be an increase in child benefit. If he does, he knows that he cannot fulfil the terms laid upon him by the Child Benefit Act to review the benefit impartially each year.

Mr. Favell: May I repeat the question that I put to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)? As I understand it, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is arguing for universal benefits for all. Is he in favour of abolishing family credit?

Mr. Field: My argument makes it irrelevant. The increase in child benefit that I propose would lift most people free of claiming family credit. It would not abolish family credit but it would make it irrelevant.

The Secretary of State cannot get up and say what he really thinks about child benefit, therefore we have to use and interpret his political body language. It is clear that he has a deep hostility to child benefit. I will bet anybody any amount of money that while the right hon. Gentleman is Secretary of State for Social Security there will be no increase in child benefit.

Are we to gather the clans and debate child benefit two or three times a year and go away satisfied, or are we to take the argument into the Government's camp? Such an opportunity will arise because when the Finance Bill returns to the Floor of the House I shall table an amendment to reintroduce child tax allowance. Of course the value of child tax allowance will have fallen because the basic rate of tax has been cut since 1979, at least nominally. But had child tax allowance been continued and increased in line with married man's tax allowance, the tax burden would not have been shifted from childless people and single people to those with children because we have not increased child benefit. That is why the reintroduction of child tax allowance is relevant.

If we are concerned about delivering resources to families with children, under this Government we have no choice but to take that route. Some would say that that was selling out child benefit. I repeat that I probably owe my place here to the work that I did with an organisation campaigning for child benefit. I am mindful of that, but I organised and helped that campaign on child benefit because I was interested in delivering to families real resources rather than token gestures.

We have a simple choice. If we are defeated tonight, either we can concede defeat and rejoice that we have put up another good fight, or we can become serious politicians about delivering resources to families with children. The only option that we have under this Government is to reintroduce child tax allowance. There will be life after Thatcherism, despite what the Prime Minister maintains, and another Government would have the opportunity to use resources committed to child tax allowance and convert them back into child benefit. There would not have to be the unhappy scramble of lobbying the Treasury for sufficient resources—£600 million according to the hon. Member for Lewisham, West—to make up the shortfall that has occurred under the present Government.

Mr. Moore: I always listen with enormous care to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I know that he would not wish to give the House inaccurate information. I do not think that he has seen the written question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and answered on Thursday 20 April. It asks specifically if one can take into account the role of tax changes between 1978-79 and 1989-90 and the impact that the changes had on families without children to discover the amount by which one would have to increase child benefit to achieve the same impact. I am sure that he would want the House to know—he is honourable in such matters, especially in the way that he is putting his point —that one would have to reduce child benefit in the cases referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch, who is not unknown as being a supporter of child benefit.

Mr. Field: It is a terrific advantage that I have not seen that parliamentary answer. I shall come back to it on another day. I am sure that the Secretary of State would not want to stop me in mid-flow as I am about to complete my comments.

[Mr. Field]

If we are defeated in the Division on the new clauses —I hope that we will not be—I hope that the seriousness with which we put our arguments will have been noted. We will be equally serious about amending the Finance Bill as the only opportunity under this Government to get resources to families with children is by reintroducing child tax allowances. I hope that the strength of our rhetoric will be matched by the voting during the Report stage of the Finance Bill.

6.30 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): It is always a daunting prospect to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) who is an acknowledged authority on social security. He made one point with which I can agree in principle, although not in practice. He said that positive efforts should be made to help children, rather than mere gimmicks. I suspect that the difference between the hon. Member for Birkenhead and myself would be in interpreting the principle. We should put the debate on child benefit in the context of the fact that between 1974 and 1979 the real-terms value of income support benefits for the family fell by 7 per cent., whereas in the last decade it has increased by 27 per cent. I think that I am right in saying that the hon. Member for Birkenhead, in a previous life with the Child Poverty Action Group, was critical of the Labour Government and their record on providing financial help to families.

I part company with the hon. Gentleman on how one gives the maximum amount of financial help to the most genuinely needy children.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not want to distract the hon. Gentleman from the thrust of his argument, but I should put it on record that the figures he has quoted are a peculiar and motley collection of statistics. They include support given to carers of elderly people, not merely children. Also, they primarily reflect the number of people dependent on benefits because of the increase in unemployment.

Mr. Burns: I was talking about family support. I did not target my comments specifically at children. I am sure that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) finds the figures somewhat curious because they do not support her argument. They put fairly and squarely the real-terms support that the Government have given to the family over the past decade.

I find the present child benefit arrangements extraordinary because—I speak as a parent of a young child, so my wife beneefits from the system—6·7 million families in Britain with 12 million children receive £7·25 tax free every week. Of the £4·5 billion—10 per cent. of the social security budget—spent on child benefit, £1 billion goes to 1·25 million families earning over £20,000 a year. I cannot understand, taking it to its logical conclusion, why the wife of a Member of Parliament or a Cabinet Minister should receive the same tax-free sum as the most genuinely needy members of society. I would be happy, as would my wife, for that money to be targeted towards those genuinely in need, because it would be of much more financial help to them.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): On that argument, would my hon. Friend get rid of the single person's allowance on the ground that it is worth more to higher rate taxpayers? Would he abolish the married person's allowance, the business expansion scheme and mortgage interest tax relief on the ground that they are worth more to higher rate taxpayers?

Mr. Burns: I should have anticipated that intervention because it is not the first time that we have heard it during this debate.

Mr. Frank Field: Answer it.

Mr. Burns: I shall answer it in my own way.

We are discussing the way to target the maximum amount of resources to the most needy in society. I believe that child benefit for families such as mine is unfair and is not the best way to use resources. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right to freeze child benefit for two years and, in the uprating this year, to target the money to the child allowance part of the other benefits. If hon. Members study the figures they will see that, over and above the uprating, he is increasing by 50p per child the amount available in income support and housing benefit.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has found his tongue after his long silence in Committee. Will he acknowledge that the position of children in Britain has become worse as a result of the policies pursued by the Secretary of State and that the failure to uprate child benefit has compounded the problem? Does he agree that even the change in the more recent announcements does not compensate for the loss? Will he recognise that child benefit is intended to benefit children? He has not yet mentioned children. He has talked about tax rates for adults. We are talking about a benefit directed towards children universally. Surely even he must accept that that is a good thing and a benefit to the nation's children.

Mr. Burns: I welcome the first part of the hon. Gentleman's intervention because it was made in complete ignorance. I think that I am right in saying that in the Committee on the Social Security Bill he failed to attend at the start of each of our morning sittings. If you look at the record you will see that you attended far fewer sittings than I did and that I contributed to the debates.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman speak through the Chair?

Mr. Burns: I am sorry.

One has to look at the argument about children through the parents' tax position. The money is being given to the mother to spend on the children. My original point—I do not want to make a long speech—is that the current arrangement in which nearly one quarter of those in receipt of child benefit earn incomes in excess of £20,000 is wrong. The money could be better targeted by increasing other benefits so that those in genuine need benefit rather than rich families being given an extra tax-free allowance that would be worth more to them than the poorest families.

I shall support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) mentioned average wages. I was an engineer for 20 years

in Scotland, but I never earned an average wage. I worked for a well-known firm in Scotland, but I never earned an average wage of £250. Highly skilled engineers at that well-known firm still do not earn that much. Many people in my constituency make £86 a week, if they are lucky. I live in Linwood—every hon. Member is aware of the closure of the car factory—where there is still vast unemployment. Many wives rely on child benefit and would love the Government to show care and compassion by agreeing to uprate child benefit.

Over 2·25 million children are living at or below the poverty level. The mothers of those kids are desperate and would prefer to receive child benefit every week rather than queue up, be means tested and plead and beg for money for their children. Child benefit should be a right, and tonight the Government have a golden opportunity to agree.

Since the Government took office in 1979, there have been 20 cuts in benefit for the family and yet the Tory party claims to be the party of the family. The Government offer the family despair and destruction and they do not care whether our children have as decent a future as children in other nations. Britain has the lowest level of public funding for child care in Europe, yet in its manifesto the Tory party claims to be the party of the family, which is a travesty of the truth.

Over the past 10 years, child benefit has fallen by 27 per cent. It is unbelievable and ridiculous that we are allowing mothers and children to suffer. Conservative Members must not forget that there are not many people walking the streets of Glasgow and Strathclyde—where there is massive unemployment and poverty—wearing designer clothes or fashion suits from Savile row. They queue up at jumble sales and secondhand shops and buy their furniture secondhand.

The Government have a golden opportunity to redress some of the imbalances and injustices that have occurred since they took office, such as the massive cuts in social security and the punishing of the poor and needy. Conservative Members have an opportunity to ensure that child benefit is uprated. It is a good benefit and has a high take-up rate. They should stand up and be counted so that the children and the poor and needy have some extra in their pockets this week.

6.45 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): The question whether child benefit should be automatically uprated understandably raises strong emotions. As the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said, child benefit has been around for almost a decade and a half. It is a universal benefit, so there is no problem claiming it and it makes a useful contribution to the income of every family with children. However, the fact that child benefit is simple, universal and easy to claim does not constitute a reason for unfailingly increasing its value in line with inflation every year.

If one is to rely on targeting benefits, it is essential that the help reaches those who need it. Conservative Members who regard uprating child benefit as an expensive and imprecise way of helping families in genuine need must be reassured that take-up levels of family credit will rise and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take whatever steps are necessary to inform those who are eligible of their rights.

It amuses me that at a time when the Labour party is on the verge of unveiling its repackaged tax policy and when phrases such as "fair" and "relevant" rates of tax are all the rage among Labour Front Bench spokesmen, the hon. Member for Livingston is supporting an uprating of benefit that is unfair and unrelated to income.

I fully support the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples), so I shall not waste the House's time by repeating the case that he made, but it hardly seems fair that millions of working people on modest incomes should be paying taxes to fund the £1 billion cost of child benefit for 1·25 million families who are earning more than £20,000 a year. Where is the fairness in that? If the Labour party believes that people on higher income should pay higher rates of tax, why does it not follow through the logic of its argument by accepting that those same people on high income simply do not need increased child benefit? The fact that three quarters of the families who benefit from increases in child benefit have incomes above male average earnings is eloquent testimony to the utterly indiscriminate nature of child benefit.

We have all heard stories of how well-to-do, middle-class families spend their child benefit on extravagant luxuries and sometimes items that have no connection with their children. On any objective analysis, millions of parents in receipt of child benefit have no need for that money. Undoubtedly they are grateful for it, but, none the less, they regard it as a windfall, a bonus or an extra.

I do not believe that the Government should distribute huge amounts of taxpayers' money to those who do not need it. It is curious to see the Labour party defending a system that gives an awful lot of money to an awful lot of people who would not think twice before spending the equivalent of a month's child benefit on a meal out or a couple of compact discs.

Not only does child benefit go to those who are perfectly able to look after themselves and their children, but, to make things worse, increases in child benefit have no impact on the incomes of those in real need—the people on income-related benefits. Given that child benefit already costs the nation £4·5 billion a year, we should be absolutely convinced that benefits will go to those in need before supporting proposals to index link child benefit each and every year.

I see no evidence that uprating child benefit is a cost-effective way of helping those families that need help most. The fact that some people do not claim the income-related benefits to which they are entitled is not a reason for putting even more cash into universal benefits. Far better results for many more families in real need can be achieved simply by making a greater effort to promote income support and family credit. I very much hope that the Government's social policy will follow that course.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): I am a stranger to social security debates. I take the view, as do a number of my colleagues, that normally just a few dozen hon. Members on both sides of the House understand the more obscure points of social security and, alack, they are not saying what they are thinking; they are merely saying what they have been told to say.

This debate is significant. It marks where we are as a Government and where we are tending in social terms. I remember hearing, when in opposition, my Front-Bench

[Mr. Cyril D. Townsend]

colleagues explaining to the House how important this new child benefit would be. Above all, we were told, at last something would be done about the poverty trap, which we were all busily discussing at the time. We were told that it would be a simple system, that there would be a high take-up rate, and that it would be easy to administer. It was a time of considerable inflation, at levels far greater than today. No doubt my right hon. and learned Friend the present Secretary of State for Health had that in mind when, speaking in Committee on the Child Benefit Bill in 1975, he introduced an amendment for the statutory uprating of child benefit every six months in line with inflation. His words are worth remembering:

"I cannot see how a reputable case can be raised against that proposal."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 24 June 1975; c. 150.]

To catch the flavour of those days, I point out that my right hon. Friend the then Leader of the Opposition wrote a letter in February 1978 to the National Council for One Parent Families, saying:

"We are impatient to implement the child benefit scheme fully. This measure will do more than any other single benefit to help families in caring for their children".

A number of things have changed since that letter was written, one of which has been pointed out by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). In 1987, he wrote a letter to *The Times*, saying:

"If we leave to one side how poverty is defined, there is general agreement across the political spectrum that, over recent years, there has been a significant increase in the numbers on low incomes. Child benefit directly relates a family's income to the size of its responsibilities."

We are faced as a country with a growing problem of poverty in our inner cities. The family credit way forward is not a working option. To start with, the form on family credit—I do not have the latest document but the one that I have from my social security office has 15 pages—is a Becher's brook of a form, and we should do better. It is not good enough. The take-up rate is only 50 per cent.

We can take any other walk of life. Suppose that we were told that a shop was open for only 50 per cent. of normal shop hours or that a train service was only half operating. They would not be taken seriously and would not be seen to be going concerns. Family credit falls into that category.

There is one personal point which, surprisingly, has not come up before in this debate. We are talking about index linking. I think that it is recognised that index linking is the norm. We have a row about pensions—should they be based on historic rates of inflation or forecasts of inflation—and the Government are winning that hands down, but no one is saying, "How terrible it is that they are index linked". In personal terms, every right hon. and hon. Member has his parliamentary salary, car allowance and London allowance index linked. All those who will vote against the new clause tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) and his colleagues will be saying, "What applies to me in 1989 does not apply to those mothers in my constituency who are struggling to bring up families. Other factors have crept into the argument. The situation is entirely different."

We have heard about those well-heeled ladies who are worried that they are getting child benefit when they do not need it. Letters from them have not been filling my postbag. If they did, I would say to them, "This benefit must be physically collected." I have sometimes collected it on behalf of my wife. One has to go to the post office, perhaps on a wet and windy day, stand in a queue and collect it. I would say, "If you are well-heeled and you and your children do not need child benefit, stay at home shampooing the dog or watching EastEnders. Do not waste time". I am told that the great system quietly puts the money aside and it goes back into the common wheal, and no time and effort are wasted by the bureaucracy finding out why Mrs. Jones has failed to collect her benefit. There is, therefore, an easy solution.

This is a serious debate. The family is under great strain in this country and throughout the western world, and I need not enlarge upon that point. The divorce rate, the number of children in care and child poverty are up. Here we have a system that does something about the poverty trap. If we are genuine in our belief that the family is the basic social unit of our society, is it not incredible that we are allowing the financial support for it to diminish over the years? My right hon. Friends must reply to this point: how can we claim to be looking after families when, year by year, we have singled out child benefit to be reduced?

There is also the wider point of where we are tending to go as a Government and a party. What has been the point of running our economy more efficiently and getting greater wealth rippling out through society if we are not prepared as a nation and a Parliament to tackle those pools of poverty that disgrace our cities, if we are not prepared to take note of how many people are homeless in Greater London, sleeping in miserable cardboard boxes, and if we are not prepared to notice that poor families in our towns, cities and constituencies are suffering and we are supposed to represent them?

Winston Churchill had a good phrase. He used to talk about bringing in the rear guard, meaning, in social security terms, looking after those who have fallen behind. If year by year we cut child benefit, or, worse, if in the next Parliament we chop it off altogether, we are not bringing in that rear guard—it will fall further behind and become increasingly isolated and vulnerable.

Mr. Marlow: If I may, let me take the House back to the eloquent, if in my belief mistaken, speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples). He seemed to be saying that it was wrong to give benefits to those who were earning more than, say, £15,000 a year. He is an intelligent and civilised man and I expect that he would accept that that is to a certain extent simplistic. He almost suggested that there is a zero sum and that there are those in our society who are financially givers and that there are those who are takers. It is not like that at all. The reality is that we are all givers—we are all taxpayers.

7 pm

I believe that the basis of the case of those of us who support new clause 2 is that even for those who are on more than £15,000 a year—which is hardly the wealthy in this day and age and many have very large mortgage commitments—we would like the net take by the state, that is, net of allowances and benefits, to be less from those with children than from those without children. Knowing what a civilised man my hon. Friend is, I would expect him to support that objective.

Let us suppose that two young people set up home and decide to settle down together. There are two mouths and two incomes. A child is born. There are three mouths and,

most typically, one income. Is this the time to freeze or —if I may interpret—to reduce still further their relative financial situation? I believe that it is not, and I think that my hon. Friend will believe that it is not. Housing costs are at an all time high and young couples, some of whom in my hon. Friend's terms are relatively wealthy, have stretched their finances to the limit to get on the housing ladder. Rising interest rates have seen those costs rise still higher—higher than they would have feared and higher than they would have imagined. No one would start a family in order to acquire, or for the sole purpose of acquiring, child benefit, but given the massive financial and other pressures which today discourage young people from having children, it would seem to me to be the politics of bedlam to make life even more difficult. I imagine that it is hardly part of the Government's policy that the race should begin to die out.

I wish to concentrate on one aspect of child benefit and that is the part of child benefit that replaces child tax allowance. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West or my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard)—who is not here at the moment—are against child tax allowance. I asked them the question. I know that there were a lot of Members who wanted to speak and perhaps they felt that it was not appropriate to answer it at that time. Let me try to sell them the concept of child tax allowance—let me even try to sell it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

When we had child tax allowance, it was universally approved and universally acceptable. There might have been people who were against the family allowance, there might have been people who said, "Why give money to people just because they have children?", but nobody was against the child tax allowance.

Why should we return to it? First, it allows people to keep more of their own income—a philosophy that is very close to the Government's heart. Secondly, it takes people out of tax, which is particularly important for wage earners seeking to support large families. It is a powerful incentive against dependence—if I may say so, pure Thatcherism. Maybe I have sold it to my hon. Friends, maybe not. If I am trying to sell it to the Government, let me try a more machiavellian approach. At a stroke, by reintroducing child tax allowance, we would reduce the amount of money taken in tax and, at the same time, reduce Government expenditure. I am offering to the Government, overnight, the ability significantly to reduce Government expenditure as a proportion of gross national product. They should grasp that opportunity with both hands.

Child tax allowance was—as child benefit is—the only fiscal measure that recognised the additional burden of families with children at all levels of income. As I intend to support new clause 2 later this evening, I shall probably be in trouble with the Whips—not much, because they are a fairly civilised bunch—but as I am known to be ambitious let me try to curry favour with them at the same time.

May I quote my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones)? He said, quite rightly:

> "Child benefit was introduced to take the place of the old child tax allowance . . . They were there to achieve some sort of equity at all income levels for families with children as compared to families without children."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1981; Vol. 998, c. 204.]

He was right then in 1981. Although he has taken the Trappist vows, let me encourage him by saying that the point he made then is equally valid now. It is particularly valid for the very large numbers of near poor. The Government's policy is targeting. In general, I support that policy, particularly if it hits the right target. But we have a problem with the near poor, especially those who are seeking to maintain their independence, be they elderly or be they families. The problem is that every time we miss the target, we hit the finances of the near poor.

On the Government's own terms, let us look at the argument behind this debate—targeting. If child benefit is frozen, it is decreased. As hon. Members have already said, we are transferring resources from those with children to those without children. Is that what the Government want from targeting? The married man's tax allowance, as has been said, has increased by some 22 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West said that tax rates have been reduced. That is true. My hon. Friend is, no doubt, very proud of that and I am sure that my hon. Friend will go along with me and be quite modest about it and say that, of course, the married man's tax allowance has not increased by 22 per cent. in reality because there has been an 8 per cent. reduction in levels of taxation and it has therefore only increased by 14 per cent. That is not bad—it is an increase. But child benefit has gone down by 12 per cent. and, as I have said before, benefits and allowances are two sides of the same coin.

The question before the Government is that if they want to target—and we should want to target—why target by taking resources from those with more mouths to feed and give them to those with fewer mouths to feed? I am an easy man—a simple man, some might say. I have said that I intend to support new clause 2. However, if my right hon. Friend would undertake to the House that he will target —as a Conservative should target—and accept the new clause, or, if he will not accept it, will give some indication to the House that we will go back to the system of child tax allowances, I am sure that I and a lot of my hon. Friends would be satisfied.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I welcome the opportunity to say a few words about the new clause. I urge the House to reject it for a number of reasons.

We must have a flexible approach to the provision for families. We are faced with the fact that, whatever happens in terms of income or other changes, we have indexing and uprating. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is not in his seat, pointed out that we are now enjoying record living standards. The situation has changed since the introduction of child allowances. When they were introduced, we were living in a high-tax society. We are now living in a much more prosperous and low-tax society, which calls for alternative ways of directing aid to the poorer families in our society.

There are two fundamental reasons for rejecting the new clause. First, no targeting is involved. The top 5 per cent. of earners receive the child allowance in exactly the same way as the bottom 5 per cent. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) says that the top 5 per cent. should stay at home and wash the dog. The fact is that they do not. They go out and obtain child allowance; 98 per cent. are claiming it, whether they need it or not. Members of Parliament who, like myself, have children have a disposable income of £300 a week and do

[Mr. Kenneth Hind]

not need extra money in child allowances. Those on low incomes, on the other hand, genuinely need the money and we should target it to their benefit, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is trying through family credit to target those who are worse off. That is what we should be doing, and I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend is using the media very effectively to seek to encourage a better take-up. I hope that he will succeed.

Mr. Lester: At what level of income would my hon. Friend decide that he could do without his mortgage interest tax relief and his married man's allowance?

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I shall go on to deal with that very question.

My hon. Friends who support the new clause believe that there is no alternative means of protecting the poor and worse-off families. There is an alternative. We should be turning back the pages of history and re-examining the proposals on tax credits in the 1972-73 Green Paper. If we work towards an integrated tax and benefits system, we shall be working towards a progressive method of aiding families with children, whereby those who are worse off get the most and those paying 40p in the pound in tax do not receive benefit. That is a proposal for the future, and the new tax reform proposals will help us to achieve that.

Under a tax credit system, a woman could be given the credit for her children, which would overcome one of the major objections. Child allowances should be paid to the mother. I commend those considerations to the House.

The new clause does not solve the problem; it is too rigid for the future and I shall vote against it.

Mr. Favell: Anyone listening to the debate might go away with two misconceptions. The first is that the debate is about the abolition of child benefit, which it is not. The Government are committed to retaining child benefit. The second misconception is that the inflation-proofing of child benefit—that is what it is all about—will somehow benefit the very poorest, which it will not. If the new clause is passed, 3 million children and 1·5 million families will be not one jot better off.

The thrust of the Government's social security proposals has been to target benefit on those in the most need. I shall be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will tell the House just what the Government have done for the very poorest.

Mr. Lester: I support all those who have spoken in favour of the new clause and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) on the able way in which he introduced the subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) hit the nail on the head: if child benefit were still a tax allowance, there would be no argument about indexation. It would have been indexed along with all the other tax allowances. It is because the House decided, in order to reach those who do not pay tax, to change to child benefit—which should be called child credit—that we have this argument every time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) pointed out the variations in the amounts that go in tax allowances and in child benefit. Perhaps it would help if we renamed child benefit "child credit" and presented the Treasury with the fixed amount of credt for the majority, which converts automatically into a fixed tax credit, and attributed to the budget of the Department of Social Security only the sums that went to people who do not pay tax. That might help people to understand that child benefit is a hybrid measure. Our argument is not with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State; it is whether the element that goes to those who pay tax should be a tax allowance while the rest is added to my right hon. Friend's budget.

7.15 pm

Another point that has not been made clear is that child benefit is a poverty-preventive benefit. It is all right to talk about those in need and about targeting the very needy, but the fact that child benefit is paid to many families—some with apparently high incomes—is poverty-preventive. In the London area in particular there are families on average incomes of about £11,000 a year who, because they have heavy mortgage payments, may have a net income that would bring them within family credit. Because they have a mortgage, however, they are not allowed to claim it. They may have a net income less than the maximum for income support, but, because they are in work, they are not allowed to claim income support. More than 60 per cent. of families with incomes of less than £15,000 a year benefit greatly from child benefit. I cannot believe that a benefit that is easy to understand, popular, fair, poverty-preventive, family-friendly, incentive-friendly, inflation-friendly and targeted to people who genuinely need it is withering on the vine in this way.

Denmark, which subjected child benefit to proof of need in 1977, removed the means test in 1987 largely because of the disincentive effect. Do not let us make the same mistake. I hope that all my hon. Friends will support the new clause.

Mr. Squire: It is no criticism of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber to suggest that there is an element of predictability about the debate. I suspect that my speech will be subject to the same criticism. I echo those who have said how much we miss Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, who always made his mark in debates such as this. It is only fair to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) who, in a return to a subject in which he was notorious—if that is the right word—a few years ago, powerfully argued the case for uprating child benefit.

There are various issues that divide the Conservative party from time to time. We usually manage to find a compromise. On this issue, however, we seem to be having to struggle to find a compromise. Perhaps a tax allowance is the answer. Several of my hon. Friends have argued forcefully the case against the present system, essentially on the ground that they dislike the idea of people with higher incomes receiving the benefit. It does not seem to matter that only 5 per cent. of taxpayers pay the higher rate. It does not even seem to matter that, as we know from last year's figures, 60 per cent. of child benefit goes to those earning less than £15,000 per annum, which I do not necessarily regard as a high income. Presumably, my hon. Friends would support that take-up; we have not reached 60 per cent. take-up of family credit. In considering the direction of benefits, my hon. Friends who object to the uprating of child benefit should recognise that it reaches the poorest, even if it also reaches the richest.

More than one of my hon. Friends said how difficult it was for their wives, who seem to be forced to go along to claim child benefit. I realised that child benefit was a universal benefit, but I had no idea that it was compulsory. Clearly, things have advanced somewhat, and my hon. Friends' wives are being dragged, kicking and screaming, to the post office to claim the benefit—a horrible thought. They do not have to claim child benefit and, more seriously, if that is their concern we should change the arrangements through the tax system, not by messing around with the benefit system.

For reasons that some of my colleagues have advanced, child benefit remains the most effective way of tackling family poverty. With a take-up of about 98 per cent., it is the only income that many women receive in their own right. Most important—this point has not been stressed in the debate—it is worth the same, whether one is in or out of work. That means that, over the next decade, when we will wish to encourage many more people back into work, it will not have the negative effects of the poverty-employment trap whereby people lose money simply by coming off benefits, compared with what they might earn in employment.

There is a danger of family credit being viewed as a panacea. I unreservedly welcome the campaign that the Government have just announced. I wish to see a higher take-up. But that cannot solve the problem. We must welcome any reduction in the 250,000 families who are estimated to be eligible for family credit but are not currently receiving it. In their wildest, most optimistic moments, my right hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues do not imagine that the take-up will remotely approach the present take-up for child benefit. Every family that is not receiving that benefit will lose out under a system of increasing family credit only.

An article in *The Times* of 25 March suggested, among other things, that the Government were considering stopping the payment of child benefit to better-off working mothers. I am the last person to suggest that *The Times* is invariably a paper of record. I hope that, in this case, the Ministers have been wrongly quoted. In the relief of poverty, particularly for single mothers, child benefit will be as critical in the 1990s as it has been during the 1980s. In the United States, an almost permanent under-class was created because of an almost total reliance on means-tested benefits. We want to avoid that. If we want to encourage people back to work, we must use the available weapons, and there is no better weapon than child benefit.

We talk a lot about the value of the family, but surely it should also have some cost to society and to the Government. It is not a phrase that should be trotted out when we want to say something about the family, but not backed up in any way by money. The intellectual argument for continuing to freeze child benefit is, presumably, that is should ultimately disappear or become relatively irrelevant. There is an intellectual argument for doing away with it. There is an intellectual argument for the case put forward by my hon. Friends who agree with me. There is no intellectual argument for freezing it as it is at present.

The first aims of any benefit system are to make receipt more certain and future escape from poverty more likely. That is the power of child benefit. It does that at present. That is why it is necessary and why I hope that hon. Members will support new clause 2.

Mr. Moore: I will try to move at a reasonable pace, because I appreciate that the House is anxious to move on. An awful lot of points have been made and I should like to address the three inter-related themes or sets of arguments that I have detected. The first surrounds those who misunderstand—some genuinely and some wilfully—the history and the purpose of child benefit. Then there is a set of arguments surrounding those—of course they had to be among the Opposition—who want to use the Government's decision this year to pervert the truth of the Government's outstanding record and their commitment to the family. The third strand of the debate surrounds those who, with their deep and long commitment to helping families with children, are worried that the present judicious mix of child benefit, the new income support and family credit structure may be a less effective way of targeting help than through higher universal child benefit. I shall try briefly to address those three arguments.

It is important to remind the House of the history, and, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said, of what we are debating. We are debating a 1975 statute and I, as Secretary of State, have a beholden duty to the House and to the country to seek to put it into effect. I shall briefly discuss what it replaces. It has been a constant theme in the debate on child tax allowances and family allowances. It is also critical to remind hon. Members about what we never sought it to be.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), whose speeches I always enjoy, indelicately said that child benefit was introduced by Pitt and dropped out for a period during the 19th century. Pitt introduced CTAs in 1799, and they dropped out in 1805, not to reappear again until 1909. Ninety four out of 100 years is more than just a period. My right hon Friend legitimately asked us to go back to the beginning of the debate on child benefit. It is essential to do so. It lies at the back of the puzzlement of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). He continues to say that questions have not been answered about the nature and role of it.

I remind the House of the agreed basis upon which I, as Secretary of State, seek to put the arguments behind the introduction of child benefit. I will quote from the late Alec Jones in the debate in 1975, and I will also quote Mrs. Castle. She made it absolutely clear that the Social Security Act 1975 laid down

"formal provisions for annual review of benefits paid under that Act and requires uprating of those benefits in line with earnings or prices as appropriate. We do not propose that there should be anything similar for child benefit because it is a totally different kind of benefit, fulfilling a different purpose.

In the first place it is a new kind of benefit—a hybrid, which amalgamates a social security benefit with a tax allowance. In the second place, most of the people receiving it will be people at work."

She went on to state:

"It will be raised from time to time in the light of inflation and other developments. But just as neither family allowances nor child tax allowances are subject to the rigid pattern of upratings that has been evolved for social security benefits nor will their successor benefit be."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1975, c. 330-400.]

The position was made clear. At the conclusion of the debate, after our late hon. Friend, Sir Brandon Rhys Williams sought to intervene, Mrs. Castle went on to say:

"There is a difference between routine national insurance benefits and this new benefit. Indexation of the child benefit is inappropriate. National insurance benefits are major means of support when earning capacity is interrupted, but the child benefit is a tax-free supplement to families whose major

[Mr. Moore]

source of income is earnings. Clearly maintenance benefits must be capable of moving automatically in line with changes in the cost of living. The child benefit is in a different category."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1975; Vol. 895, c. 238.] She went on precisely to describe what her statutory duty was, which is the duty that I seek to carry out.

That is the background to the history of the introduction. What did it replace? My hon. Friend the Member for Broxstowe (Mr. Lester), the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) said that, if it were a tax allowance, it would be inconceivable that it would not be annually increased. That is not what happened in practice. During the longest clear period straddling major parties from 1946 to 1970, child tax allowances went up, not 25 times in 25 years, but five times. Family allowance rose four times. There was no increase between 1963 and 1968. My right hon. and hon. Friends should take more pride in the fact that in eight out of 10 years since 1979 we have increased child benefit. However, no Governments have ever sought to suggest that child benefit reflects the cost of a child.

I hope that the hon. Member for Livingston will state the Opposition's view on this clearly. The hon. Member for Birkenhead has a consistent and coherent view and he has argued genuinely that child benefit should be much higher than it is now. He repeated his arguments tonight. There is a consistency in his arguments and their inter-relationship with the rest of the relief system. However, I have great difficulty understanding what the hon. Member for Livingston believes.

7.30 pm

I want to refer to an excellent interview in "Poverty" magazine which appeared in autumn 1987. In that article the hon. Member for Livingston was asked about the taxation of child benefit. He said:

"At some future date, it may or may not be appropriate to tax child benefit . . . there is no case for taxing it until you get to a level which actually matches the cost of a child and we are a long way from that."

On 18 January, the hon. Member for Livingston said that

"At a time when it reflects one third of that cost"—

the cost, he said, of looking after a child—

"it appears utterly ludicrous to suggest that we lower its value by another quarter."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1989; Vol. 145, c. 352.]

Later in that debate, he changed that from one third to a quarter. We cannot debate different levels in that way. What is the official Opposition's position? If the hon. Member for Birkenhead is voicing the Labour party view or if that view is truly expressed by the hon. Member for Livingston, there will be an additional current expenditure cost of £9 billion to raise child benefit by tripling it and of £13·5 billion to raise it by quadrupling it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Livingston is interjecting now gently and in an amusing way. I want to remind him that earlier today he said:

"Child benefit should be a stable constant support for the expense of children."

The Opposition cannot have it both ways. It is either a supplement based on the history of child benefit which we all recognise or, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead has said, if it is more than a supplement what extra expenditure —substantive expenditure as opposed to making indexation permanent—would the hon. Member for Livingston desire?

My hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) and for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard), in their excellent speeches, both questioned my statutory duty. I do not have the choice of looking at child benefit in isolation. I must rightly consider the relationship between child benefit and the economic and social patterns in our country. I want to remind the House of what has happened to the average male wage earner. I accept the limitations of considering him, but we have income support systems and family credit for people below the average wage level. The take home pay of the average male wage earner in 1987-88 rose per week by £18·86. To January 1989, the latest clear figures that I have to show the latest comparisons, the average male wage earner's increment has gone up by £20 per week. That is the pattern against which I must judge child benefit among other forms of help and assistance for families with children. I will not belabour the House with the pattern of change over the past 10 years which is equally relevant and would be equally successful.

Mr. Lester: When my right hon. Friend quotes those increases in net income, should he not also put against that the increase in net mortgage payments? We are really talking about the net disposable income after paying for accommodation rather than net take-home pay.

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West made those points clearly. I am not suggesting that other features have not occurred. When I try to make judgments, I must take into account the relevant factors as I am statutorily bound to do, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead constantly reminds me.

Mr. Robin Cook: It is perfectly proper for the Secretary of State to take account of those matters in reaching his decision on whether to uprate child benefit. However, he will be aware that the same figures about growth and take-home pay will be before the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he makes his decision about the married man's tax allowance. Why, over the past two years when he was confronted with those figures, did the Chancellor of the Exchequer think it appropriate to increase the married man's tax allowance, but the Secretary of State for Social Security thought it inappropriate to raise child benefit? Why should it be right to recognise the increased costs of sustaining a wife, but wrong to recognise the increased costs of sustaining a child?

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman seems not to have listened to what I have been saying for the past five minutes. I have tried to show that it is impossible to compare the nature of child benefit with the whole of the tax and benefits system which is regarded as a fundamental feature of the way in which families should be supported. We must consider the way in which a family has seen its net benefits increase. For example, with a reduction in real terms in the overall tax level, the married man's allowance changes have not had quite the significance that the surface figures might suggest. Beyond that, we must take account of the relevant position of the family—its actual net disposable income. In that respect, I will not just consider average male earnings.

If we consider those on half average income, it is clear that over the past decade their net take home pay has risen by 25 per cent. That is not a bad comparison with the 4·2 per cent. it rose under Labour. We must compare those huge increases in net disposable income with this debate about a potential 45p increase for those who would benefit from entitlement.

My next point relates to the character of this debate. Some Opposition Members have sought to focus on an attempt to pervert the truth of the Government's astonishingly successful record in trying to improve the overall position of families with children. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) made a valid point about that. He reminded the House—which should not need reminding—of the relevant records over the past decade in comparison with the Labour Government's period of office. We must remember that family support is not simply child benefit.

The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) made an emotional speech and I do not deny that emotion exists in these areas. However, he is trapped in the belief that child benefit is the only support structure for families with children.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is for women.

Mr. Moore: With respect to my hon. Friend, it is not the only benefit which goes to women. The same applies, by statute, to family credit. There is similarly an option with income support.

We must consider the support structure provided by this Government over the past decade for families with children. There has been a staggering 27·3 per cent. increase in real terms in that respect in comparison with a reduction during the Labour Government's period of office of 7 per cent. The challenge by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was wrong. I draw her attention to the precise figures which have already appeared in *Hansard*. Unfortunately, I do not have the references for them at the moment.

Mr. Marlow: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend seems to be answering the questions that were put to him by producing a series of statistics which relate to a question which has not been put to him. Perhaps my right hon. Friend can strengthen his position by telling the House how much more generous we are in this country with our support for children than our European partners?

Mr. Moore: I could, but I was trying to make progress.

Perhaps I can correct the misapprehension created by the incorrect figures quoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour). I am sure that he did not mean to create that impression. He quite rightly congratulated us on our help for one-parent families. For a two-parent family with one child aged under two, the United Kingdom stands ahead of every other member state in its child benefit payments. For a two-parent family with two children aged under six, the United Kingdom ranks third behind Belgium and Luxembourg. That is not a bad comparison. Perhaps the hon. Member for Derby, South would like me to pursue that point.

The relevant figures that I read out in regard to support for families with children are not due to increased unemployment. Neither unemployment benefit, supplementary benefit nor income support for the unemployed is included. This is entirely consistent with the definition of "family", in the breakdown of expenditure by client group, that has appeared regularly in public expenditure White Papers over the past eight or nine years. For the benefit of the House, I repeat that that means one-parent benefit, family income supplement, family credit, child benefit or its equivalent, maternity grant and allowance, statutory maternity pay, supplementary benefit and housing benefit for lone parents, and additional personal tax allowance for lone parents. This touches in a very minor way on the elderly, because the figure includes benefits paid to lone parents and to people looking after elderly parents. In the data the two cannot be disaggregated, but the difference is likely to be very small indeed. It does not in any way deny the astonishing contrast in records of support for families with children.

However, it is astonishing, in detail, that the Opposition, as opposed to my right hon. and hon. Friends, can in any way question the specific in regard to child tax allowances, family allowances and family credit. I remind the House that the real value of child benefit has been higher throughout this Government's period of office than it was at any time during the Labour Administration, except when they increased it in their last month in office. I will not go into too much detail, because it might be quite painful to Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman wants me to go into precise detail, I shall be only too delighted to do so.

I do not know how many Opposition Members who have not been here throughout the debate would like to be reminded of the situation. Clearly, some of them would. Well, I have plenty of time to do so. I might remind them, for example—*[Interruption.]* I can tell hon. Members who keep interrupting that I have lots more details of their appalling handling of government. For example, during the period 1976-77 to 1977-78, the equivalent of child benefit—family allowance—and in fact the whole of child tax allowances saw not just a reduction, in real terms, of £1·4 billion, but a cash reduction of nearly £300 million. That is the miserable record with which the Labour party thinks that it can challenge the Government.

Finally, I want to touch on areas that genuinely worry some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, who are concerned that the present mix of child benefit, the new income support system and family credit may be less effective in targeting help than simply increasing child benefit would be. First, I must remind my right hon. and hon. Friends that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West said, we have an entirely new structure. The hon. Member for Livingston, quite understandably, keeps trying to compare child benefit with family credit. In truth, it must be compared with the whole structure of income support and family credit. There, of course, we are talking about 1·4 million families in all, including only those currently in receipt of family credit, with nearly 3 million children. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Rowe) said, none of those families benefit, in effect, from any increment in child benefit.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury rightly asked why we did not use the new structure. That is precisely what has been done, last year and this year. The structure of new child premiums has enabled me, as Secretary of State, to give an additional £270 million to those specific families who have an entitlement but who would not see a direct benefit if I were simply to increase child benefit.

[Mr. Moore]

There was a great deal of debate about targeting. Our experience of targeting is not quite as difficult as right hon. and hon. Members seem to think. They seem to have forgotten the history—and I can give them only the data of the past pattern as opposed to the present position in regard to family credit. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) seemed to think that targeting had failed. Our experience is that £9 of every £10 of means-tested benefit reaches those for whom it is intended. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West said, the lone parents do not see it as demeaning. Indeed, they take up 97 per cent. of expenditure on their means-tested benefits.

As I said earlier, family credit goes to the mother. Contrary to what one or two hon. Members have said, all the research suggests that inhibition is caused not by the demeaning nature of means-testing, but by lack of knowledge of the character of family credit. As several right hon. and hon. Members have indicated, we are seeking to improve that knowledge.

7.45 pm

The House will be delighted to know that in the first week of the new take-up campaign the number of new claims—not repeat claims—has tripled to over 20,000. That is before we have gone into the major street campaign. I remind the House that in the first year of family credit—unlike the 17 or so years of family income supplement—expenditure take-up is going at 65 per cent. There has been a very sizeable increase, to £422 million, in the amount of money actually being spent on families with children.

Those who argue that targeting child benefit is an effective way of reaching people must be reminded that, as one or two of my hon. Friends have said, £1 billion of actual child benefit money goes to families earning more than £20,000 a year. We are discussing the current child benefit situation, a situation that continues.

Bearing in mind the 25 per cent. of families, with 3 million children, on income support and family credit that will benefit in no way at all from an increase in child benefit, one wonders why it is such an excellent illustration of targeting. That does not, of course, take into account the 2·25 million children in families earning £20,000 a year.

In urging the House to reject the new clause, I ask hon. Members to remember the flexibility that has contributed to the Government's outstanding record of support for families. That is a record that, between 1979 and 1985, has raised the living standards of lone parents by 10 per cent.; of couples with children by 9 per cent.; and, in contrast, of couples without children, and single people without children, by 6 per cent.

The record is clear. Our economic success allows me to help with a judicious mixture of universal child benefit and targeted help through income support and family credit. Our record suggests that it is in the interests of families that we retain the flexibility in the present statute, and I urge the House to reject the new clauses.

Mrs. Beckett: Clearly the House is in a mood to bring this most interesting debate to an end, and I shall seek to be extremely brief.

When child benefit was introduced, it was generally agreed that it was the most fair and effective way not only of giving support to families with children, but of giving support particularly to the poorest families with children because it tended to reduce the poverty trap. Indeed, this is the view that prevailed as recently as two years ago and lay behind the assurance given in the Conservative manifesto at the last election. That assurance was given against the background of the existence of family credit, for example, which was already on the statute book, and today child benefit remains what it has always been—one of the most popular benefits, with the highest take-up and the most efficient administration.

It is far from clear what all its opponents are really saying. Some seem to imply that there should be no form of child support at all, that those who choose to have children should simply maintain them to the full, without any support from society as a whole. Other hon. Members appeared to suggest that that support, where it is paid, should go only to the poorest families.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) asked why a constituent of his, a single taxpayer, should pay tax to help to fund child benefit. I will give him two reasons. The first is that, because of injustice, the chances are extremely high that that young person benefited from the payment of child benefit, and it is only fair that he should return to the pool what he himself received. The second reason, which may have rather more appeal to the hon. Gentleman than justice, is self interest. If we do not encourage people to have children and give them a reasonable degree of financial and other support, there will be no one to pay for that young woman's pension when she retires, because that is how our social security system works.

If the Government believe that there should be no form of child support, with due deference to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and remarks about the present duty on the Secretary of State, they have a duty to tell us that as soon as possible so that the parents of 12 million children know precisely where they stand. It is only right to put on record our belief that that signal would be as profound as it would be depressing. Moreover, it would be a signal not just of indifference but almost of hostility towards families.

The general approach has been that support should come, but only to the poorest. I remind Conservative Members who advocated that view what that might mean. As usual, they talked only of wealthy families who now receive child benefit and as if a means-tested system would be a reasonably generous one. Under the means-tested system of family credit, all help with rent or rate rebate is withdrawn at a gross income of £90 a week. If that model were to be followed for child benefit, no child support would be paid to any family with an income of more than £5,000 a year. That would be targeting all right. That would be means testing, but it would be means testing in the mould of that already followed by the Government.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West said that benefit should be withdrawn at £9,000 or perhaps £10,000. If that is the policy of his party, let it be known, published and publicised as soon as possible. Let every family with an income of over £9,000 a year know that it will cease to receive any form of child support.

If child benefit were abolished and the money saved were put to fund a cut in the rate of tax, no two-child family with an income of less than £28,000 would be better off. That is the scale of the assistance which hon. Members seek to withdraw from families.

Hon. Gentlemen who argue for a means-tested benefit should look not only at those examples, but more widely at their Government's approach to the social security system. They should consider how the child addition to unemployment benefit was first frozen and then, when it declined in value, abolished; and how the number of those allowed free meals has declined—not those who need them but those who are permitted to take them.

There has never been an answer, not even in this debate, to the question, put over and over again, why the Government put into action policies which recognise the increase in the cost of maintaining a wife, yet apparently see a decrease in the cost of maintaining a child.

Most of all, hon. Gentlemen who argue that child benefit should be means tested should have learnt from the examples of this year. The money saved by freezing child benefit did not, even on the most generous interpretation —the Government's own—go to families in greatest need. A third of it went to families who were least well off and the rest went into the Treasury's coffers, despite the fact that those on the lowest incomes, whether on income support or family credit, are still worse off from the Government's net changes to the social security system. The call for a means-tested child benefit is a call for a mean child benefit indeed.

One other possibility that has been mentioned is the return of the child tax allowance. I pay deference to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead and to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who appeared reluctantly drawn in this direction because of Government policy on child benefit. I cannot support a proposal which means that those who pay no tax get no benefit and help with the costs of raising a child or a proposal that, instead of giving the same to the Duchess of Westminster as every other mother, gives her substantially more. That proposition should not commend itself to the House.

Many in this House and outside it fear that the true source of the hostility to child benefit is the wish to see a cut in public expenditure. That may be unfair to Tory Members who support the Government on this matter and genuinely believe, however mistakenly, that they are supporting a policy to give help to those in most need. Even if that is hope triumphing over experience, hon. Gentlemen for whom that is genuinely the cause of their approach should look at the weight of the argument and the experience which goes against their belief. If they cannot vote with us tonight, they should at least abstain. If they are honest in their concern for children, particularly for children in the poorest families, and if they do not vote with us tonight, they will live to regret it; but the children will regret it most of all.

I believe that it would be for the convenience of the House if I were to withdraw new clause 1 so that we might vote on new clause 2. I shall ask leave to withdraw new clause 1.

Mr. Raison: With the leave of the House, may I say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has spoken with his usual courtesy. I do not believe that he has convinced those who have listened carefully that it can possibly make sense for the Government to allow child benefit and support for children to fade away at the same time as they continue with tax relief for earning pensioners, on mortgages and various forms of income tax, and now tax relief for those over 60 who take out private health insurance—all on a completely universal, indiscriminate, non-targeted basis. Therefore, I urge the House to support new clause 2.

Mrs. Beckett: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

Social Security Act 1986

'In section 63(3) of the Social Security Act 1986 for "(c) or (d) above" there shall be substituted "(c), (d) or, in any Order having effect on or after 1st April 1990, (f), (child benefit), above".'—*[Mr. Raison.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 194, Noes 294.

Division No. 171] **[7.56 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benyon, W.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Critchley, Julian
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*

Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrindle, Robert
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Madel, David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Radice, Giles
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Willson, Brian
Wimnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom

Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 5

INCOME SUPPORT TRANSITIONAL ADDITIONS

'In regulation 14 (A) of the Income Support (Transitional) Regulations 1987, after the word "claimant" there shall be inserted the words "or an up-rating order under section 63 of the Social Security Act 1986 comes into force".'.—*[Mrs. Beckett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.—*[Mrs. Beckett.]*

Mr. Robin Cook: A fortnight ago the House debated a motion on a Labour Supply day calling for the uprating of all claimants' benefits. That motion was specifically addressed to those people who, this April, found that they had not an extra penny in their benefit of whom there were 570,000 pensioners and other claimants. The reason why they found that they did not get an extra penny in their pension or their benefit was that they were locked into the politely termed "transitional protection", which might be more accurately described as a deep freeze.

A fortnight ago I attempted to get the House to agree to extend the uprating to embrace those 570,000 people. I failed and tonight I do not propose to reopen the case for uprating benefits for all 570,000 people in the current year. I want to address the mind of the House to next year's uprating. Virtually none of those 570,000 will get the full uprating next year either. All of them will find that next year's uprating, whatever it might be, will be reduced by the amount that they currently receive in transitional protection. A number will receive nothing in next's year's uprating, again because their transitional protection will exceed the total amount of next year's uprating. We have an idea about how many of such people there might be. In March the Government replied to a parliamentary question in which they put the number of people in that group at 140,000. That slightly understates the number who, next April, will receive nothing, because that 140,000 is measured at the mid-point of the year. At the beginning of the year there will be rather more. It might be helpful if the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State could tell the House how many there will be in April who will not receive a penny in next year's uprating.

Even though the figure affected turned out to be only 140,000, that is bad enough. We are talking about a large population who will not have received any increase in 1988, who have received no increase in 1989 and who are, under the existing rules, fated to receive no increase next year.

For some of those affected the story does not stop next year. Some who are receiving rather more than £2 or £3 in transitional protection can expect to get no increase for years to come. I have received a letter from a pensioner from Christchurch who now knows that he will not receive an increase in uprating until 1992. As he says:

"Like many others I am below the breadline and yet I face even worse conditions".

What makes that letter particularly moving is that that pensioner is 81. It must be an open question whether he will live to claim any increase in his benefits. I received a letter from a disabled woman in Putney who has worked out that she does not qualify for any uprating at present rates of inflation until 1994—four years from now. She says in her letter:

"This just about finishes me."

She is registered disabled, but, by definition, all those 140,000 people experience some form of disability and some form of chronic sickness. They are among the most vulnerable and the most frail people in Britain. After all, that is why they got the extra allowances that were abolished last year. Those allowances were to help them with the extra cost of laundry if they were incontinent, to help them with the extra cost of diet if they had special health needs for a particular diet or to help them with the extra cost of bathing if they required daily bathing. Such people are still disabled, they are still chronically sick and they still have the same health needs, but they are no longer able to afford to do anything to meet those needs.

So far the defence of the Government—the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has boldly and trenchantly made that defence on other occasions—is that to extend uprating to such people would be unfair to other claimants in identical circumstances who have claimed since April and who never got the allowances—therefore they never had the allowances to lose—and who are even worse off than those whose benefit was frozen last April. I concede that point to the Minister before he makes it. It is true that people who have come on to benefit since last April are getting even less than the people to whom I have referred. I am surprised, however, that Ministers are anxious to draw that to the attention of the House because what they are drawing attention to is how much lower benefits are as a result of the April cuts and how badly disabled people fare under the new system of benefits.

8.15 pm

There is one reason why I believe that the Government should distinguish in favour of claimants who were on benefit before last April and have found their benefit frozen since. The longer one has to subsist on social security income, the deeper one is likely to find oneself in poverty. By definition, all those who find themselves on transitional protection will have been on benefit for a

[Mr. Robin Cook]

minimum of three years by next April—most of them for much longer. God knows, the real value of their benefit was little enough in April 1987, the last time they received any uprating. By next April their benefit will have been cut by one fifth in real terms. In the past two years it has already been cut by 12 per cent. It must be difficult for any of us in the House, necessarily and by definition receiving reasonably comfortable salaries, to imagine what a 12 per cent. or 20 per cent. cut means to people living at the margins of existence.

A single person on transitional protection—no increase this year and no increase next year—could be on an income of just under £50 a week. Where is there room for a cut of one fifth in real terms in that standard of living? Which of us gathered in this Chamber tonight could manage to achieve a cut of a fifth in such an income? Leaving aside the hardship that such a cut causes and the risks and the danger to the health of frail and disabled people, there is an appalling mental stress from having constantly to juggle to balance the budget.

I have with me a long letter from a lady from Lancashire, a pensioner, who has sought to express to me what life is like living on the fixed income on which she and her husband must subsist. That income has now not increased for two years. She says:

"It is a day and night worry you cannot escape. You are isolated with it. It dominates your life. Nothing else matters (apart from other people's tragedies). If you wake in the night, it is your first thought and you cannot go back to sleep. I often have to get up at 4 am and 5 am as I cannot stay in bed. I have never told anyone this before . . . I have to try to keep my invalid husband happy, but I cannot keep such problems from him".

It is not just the financial hardship and not just the difficulty of making ends meet; it is the humiliation that accompanies the daily struggle of trying to make the budget stretch through the day that is so difficult.

The last of the letters to which I shall refer is from Abingdon, Oxfordshire. Many of the letters that I have received come from Conservative-held constituencies. This is not a problem that affects merely Labour constituencies; it also affects the constituents of Conservative Members. It is a matter of regret that, given the importance of this debate, there are so few Conservative Members present to represent their constituents who are so affected. The letter from Abingdon states:

"this morning I have received through the post a demand for my electric bill or I will be cut off . . . I just cannot pay it out of the £26 I have left each week, I still have the water and the sewerage to come. I just cannot take any more. I have been up to the dustbins at Gateways and found half a pound of butter dated for 10 April"—

two days before the letter was sent to me——

"and one or two rashers which will be my dinner today. Most days I can find six eggs if I am willing to get in the skip."

That is the reality of life on the breadline for a pensioner who finds that her pension is not only modest and meagre but has been cut, in real terms, since April 1987. Some pensioners will receive an increase of £2·50 by October. I welcome the fact that the Government will provide that increase to those on transitional protection. However, lest the Minister raise that matter in defence of the Government, I point out that the two letters to which I have referred are from pensioners much younger than 75 who will receive no extra help in October but will be stuck on a level of benefit that is not only meagre but is declining and will continue to decline as inflation rises.

Last Wednesday night, at a single sitting, I read more than 100 such letters that had been preserved for me by my office. I confess that I had not intended to read all of them and that I had prepared a standard reply, as that seemed the only way to deal with the large volume of letters I had received from pensioners since the publicity a fortnight ago about the forthcoming debate. However, having started reading, I found I could not stop and I read every single one of those 100 letters. By the time I had finished, I was left not in a state of anger at the situation but feeling deeply humble at the poverty that those who had written to me had to cope with. I also felt humbled by my inability, given the present majorities in this Parliament, to do anything material to assist them in their poverty. Many of them described heroic sacrifices that they had made in their lives. I particularly recall a letter from one widow who had nursed her disabled bed-ridden husband for 28 years. For the past 16 years he could not even speak. The reward she has received from society for that immense personal sacrifice and dedication is to be left with a frozen pension on which, she wrote to me, she was unable to afford cereals.

What comes from all those letters is a sense of bewilderment. People are bewildered as to how they can cope on a declining pension. They are also bewildered at how any Government or Minister with knowledge of their circumstances could choose to deny benefits to them. The letters are marked, too, by a bleak despair felt by those correspondents who now realise that next year, too, there will be no relief for them.

Let me acquit the present Ministers and the Department of Social Security of the responsibility for inventing the rules of transitional protection. They did not invent the rules—they inherited them from their predecessors, who were sensible enough to make good their escape before the reality hit the claimants. I do not blame the present generation of Ministers for the problem, but I will blame them if they do not act now to remedy the problem with which they must be as familiar as I am, because many of the letters I read last Wednesday were copies of letters addressed to the Secretary of State and the Minister of State. Therefore, it is for them, knowing the problem and the desperate extent of the poverty, to start tonight by giving these pensioners an assurance that their pensions will keep pace with inflation. They should tell the House that they accept the compelling evidence of poverty among those whose benefits were frozen last year and that, next year, the Government will do them the elementary justice of bringing them in from the cold.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I support the amendment for basically the same reasons put forward by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) in a measured speech that will repay careful study. The situation regarding pensioners is now fairly untenable. I have said before in this place that those of us who served on the 1986 Standing Committee that dealt with the legislation with which, essentially, we are now dealing—the Social Security Act 1986—predicted that the present situation would come about and that this House would have to return to debating the difficulties brought about by the 1986 Act. It is unreasonable to expect people who are affected by the withdrawal of transitional protection to

suffer an increase in costs of 12 per cent. this year, adding up to 20 per cent. next year, if they do not also enjoy a cash benefit increase in the uprating in April 1990.

The disabled are particularly badly hit. I, too, receive letters, probably the same copy letters as referred to by the hon. Member for Livingston; letters addressed primarily to the Secretary of State and the Department. I suppose that as the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is the most junior Minister in the Social Security team, these letters are pushed to him to read. I do not want to suggest that the Minister of State or the Secretary of State are uncaring, but I presume that they have other things to do and that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary picks up all the time consuming jobs, amongst which must be the reading of some of these letters.

Ministers may be too busy to read some of these letters themselves. When did the Parliamentary Under-Secretary last take some time—an hour or so would be enough—to get the flavour of these letters, as reported by the hon. Member for Livingston? I know that Ministers have little spare time, but I would like the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to say when he was last able to find the time specifically to read some of the letters and to see what is being said about the financial hardships being occasioned by the withdrawal of transitional protection? Anyone who reads the letters cannot help but be moved.

The letters come from constituencies represented by sitting Conservative Members. They are pleas from the heart from genuine people, not from rabble-rousers or troublemakers. The information in the letters shows that the writers are deeply hurt and aggrieved. The level of morale and the psychological state exhibited by the writers of the letters shows that they feel that life is no longer worth living.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this point, because I would like an answer, too. As my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made clear, these letters are also written to Conservative Members, and I would like to know why they do not appear to move those hon. Members. I remember that last week we had a debate on an SDP motion on the Health Service. The British Broadcasting Corporation's "Yesterday in Parliament" programme said that only one Labour Member of Parliament was present. In that case there was merely a debate taking place, whereas tonight we can actually vote, but how many Tony Members are present? The Minister, the Parliamentary Private Secretary and the Whip are here. Why are the Tory Members not moved by the experiences to which I have referred? I hope that the Tory Members, when they come back from the restaurants or wherever else they have gone, will be asked why they are not moved by the letters they must be receiving.

Mr. Kirkwood: What the hon. Gentleman has said illustrates and develops my point. I do Conservative Members the justice of saying that I believe that they probably ask for official ministerial replies on this subject. I get official ministerial replies as well. The civil servants put a slant on these matters, and this may be a trap into which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is prone to fall as well. Prima facie, such replies can be fairly plausible, because they do not actually look at the question raised and because of the tone in which they are given. Therefore, even if Conservative Members are getting the Department to respond to constituents, hon. Members are not looking behind what the ministerial replies are saying. A matching of the original requests with the replies from the Department shows that they are miles apart.

Compared with the circumstances of the claimants who write these letters, the Department is living in the financial stratosphere. The word-processed replies to these letters are glib and plausible to anybody who gives them a cursory glance but, when looked at in detail and against the background of the personal suffering shown by those who write in, they are completely inadequate. I am left humbled and frustrated, and feel completely helpless in dealing with the cases of constituents and others who complain about transitional protection.

8.30 pm

The Government cannot go on in this way because the problem will become more acute. The number of claimants may decrease as transitional protection fades away, but the problem for those caught in the trap will become worse and worse. For the foreseeable future, and at least for the rest of this Parliament, we shall return to this issue year in and year out. If the Government think that they can face down these representations, the Under-Secretary has a harder heart than I had credited him with.

The Government do not have huge sums of money, but help could be given in different ways. During the time between now and the Autumn Statement, when the upratings for next year will be made, will the Minister settle down and read some of these letters himself and cause some empirical research to be carried out into this subject? He has time and could get some experts to look at the suffering and hardship that this is causing. If he did that, it would become clear that there are ways to alleviate this problem, and they should be adopted.

As a direct result of studying the representations that have come from my constituency, I believe that the Under-Secretary has a moral duty, if not a legal duty, to take time now to advise people who are likely to lose, in cash terms, next April that transitional protection and the cash increase.

One of the most heartbreaking things this year is that people did not see this happening. I am not surprised by that, because even those who study these matters find them technically difficult to comprehend. Disabled people and others who have suffered this year, who did not expect to have to forgo a cash increase, must have found the problem even worse. Their budgets are carefully calculated under the established social security upratings system and in many cases they report to me that they did not expect to suffer this, to them, swingeing loss. Some do not know whether it will happen again next year. What, if anything, are the Government doing to prepare those who may be in that situation this year and, to a greater or lesser extent, next year? The Government have a duty to do something.

I have less to complain about than other hon. Members, who did not serve on the Committee examining the Social Security Act 1986. I underscore and support wholeheartedly the approach that the hon. Member for Livingston took. I do not complain as stridently as some other Opposition Members about social security issues or indulge in the trench warfare that sometimes breaks out. However, I can say to the Under-Secretary, hand on heart, that I think that this is a duff deal—unfair and unjust. In the next 12 months, something must be done to prevent such terrible cases happening again.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The new clause, so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), deals with the poorest pensioners—those who count every penny and who live a life of poverty that should concern us all. I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) in his intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). Across the Chamber on the Government Benches I can see only the junior Minister, the duty Whip, and the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary. There is no other Tory in the Chamber.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): There should be a senior Minister.

Mr. Winnick: My right hon. Friend is right. The Government are responsible for this legislation and in half an hour or less Tory Members will be voting in their hundreds for the Government's case.

I have received a number of letters from my constituents and I shall read out one or two of them, although I shall not identify the people concerned. One lady wrote:

"I have had a reduction in my money. I am a widow living alone with no other income at all. I am 68 years old and have some difficulty in getting about, so, as you will understand, Sir I am in no position to relieve the situation myself."

She has received no increase in income. I took the matter up with the local DSS office. Like every other DSS office, it is bound of course by Government regulations. The manager said:

"I realise that this will be a disappointing reply, but I hope that it explains the reasons behind the decision not to increase her benefit."

In all these cases, like other hon. Members, I take the matter up either locally or nationally. I think it only right and proper that I do so, although I have no illusions that my intervention in such cases can help to improve the situation locally. These are the rules, and the rules are decided by the Government.

Another constituent, a lady, wrote to me:

"Last year, I was given a transitional allowance, bringing my pension to £47·86 with my late husband's and my own credits. I had a letter from the DHSS saying my extra money had to go down, and when I received my new book and look up the sum I was going to be paid"—

she found that she was to receive the same £47·86 that she had received before. She goes on:

"Why are they allowed to do this? Food is going up all the time. I have to watch what I eat—no red meat, no other extras. There are a lot of things I can't have because of my low income."

I make no apology for reading these letters. As Members of Parliament, our responsibility is to reflect here on the Floor of the House, not just through correspondence, the hardship and deprivation suffered by our constituents, the elderly among them.

Another letter, this time from a male pensioner, says:

"I am 75 years of age. I have been on income support. I get a bit extra as a result of a work pension. There was about £3 a week. It was just over the limit. I live in my home and they have now stopped everything for me, apart from the pension."

He has a stomach difficulty and worse. He continues:

"I have been down to the DSS and they have stopped all my allowances. I do not know how long I am going to carry on."

As the House will understand, in some cases constituents do not always write the most coherent letters, but they certainly make the valid points that we must and do understand.

I received a reply from the local DSS office, which explained to me that everything was in order and that these are the Government's regulations. The manager says that he is sorry, and I am sure that he is genuinely sorry. However, he has no alternative. He says:

"In connection with your constituent being diabetic"—

the Minister should listen carefully to this—

"you are probably aware that under the income support there are no additions for special circumstances and therefore no extra benefit can be paid."

That is one constituent who has certainly suffered as a result of the change from supplementary benefit to income support.

I have another letter which runs:

"Our joint pensions have increased to £72·02 from £71·79 making a grand total of 23p increase . . . The rates have increased 49p this week making a shortfall of 26p and as you know the MEB have increased charges 9 per cent. However, I have lost my income support grant."

Perhaps the Minister will be interested in another sentence in the same letter which reads:

"Is this the thanks that we pensioners are receiving after the sacrifices made during the 1939-45 conflict? If this is so, thank this corrupt Government will you please?"

The constituent then writes that he hopes to see me at my surgery this coming Saturday.

That illustrates how pensioners who have written to me have expressed their deep concern about the way in which they have been treated. We have all said that if one person is wronged, that is a matter of concern to the House. I understand, however, that there are at least 800 cases in my constituency alone and the same is likely to be true all over the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said that some people in Conservative-held constituencies have written to him. Tory Members are not here now, but have they written to the Minister? It might be said that they do not want to embarrass the Government. That is hardly a justification. If my party were in office and treating pensioners like this, I would be making the same kind of speech here and at the party meetings upstairs——

Mr. Robin Cook: And I would be resigning.

Mr. Winnick: The Minister smiles. Perhaps he does not believe me, but I can assure him that we would not be Labour politicians if we would not take our own Government to task if we disagreed with them on such matters as this.

I doubt whether, when constituents write to Tory Members on these issues, much representation is made on their behalf. If there is, what impact does it have on the Secretary of State and the Cabinet? I do not blame the junior Minister, although that is easy, as, in some respects, he is no more responsible than I am except that it might be said that he could resign. The decisions are made by the Cabinet. He carries out his duties as a Minister—he does not consider it appropriate to resign. That is a matter for him. I do not blame him—I blame the Cabinet.

People who claim transitional protection in regard to housing benefit have lost out too. Those who have applied to the Glasgow unit of the DSS have already lost £2 a week this month. No doubt another £2 or more will be taken next year, until the transitional benefit is phased out.

The retirement pension has not been increased as it should have been. That makes the case even worse. If retirement pensions had been increased in line with earnings, as was the case under Labour, the Library informs me that a retired married couple would now be

£17·55 a week better off, and a single pensioner would be £11·10 better off. That is money that they have been cheated of as a result of the Government's decision in 1979-80 to increase pensions only in line with prices.

8.45 pm

My constituents ask about electricity, gas and water charges. It is interesting to note that the retail prices index has increased by 110 per cent. since the Government have been in office. It could be argued that that is not a great victory in the battle against inflation. The price of gas has increased by 146 per cent., electricity has increased by 123 per cent. and water charges have gone up by 183 per cent. in the past 10 years.

Pensioners, including the poorest, have got to pay for gas, electricity and water out of a pittance. As a result of what has happened some pensioners have received no increase, or a pittance—23p just as I have pointed out. What are they to do about gas, electricity and water charges? What are they to do about food, the price of which constantly goes up? That is the background to new clause 5.

I understand that Tory Members have been asked to give £10 to celebrate the Prime Minister's being in office for 10 years. I do not know whether there is a three-line Whip on it. It is thought that the money will buy an appropriate present for the Prime Minister, who will have been in No. 10 for 10 years on 3 May.

Mr. Tony Banks: Can we get together a scheme to give £20 if she will go?

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend will be seconded with great enthusiasm by the entire parliamentary Labour party.

What are the feelings of pensioners, such as the four whose letters I have quoted, about the past 10 years? They are in a far worse position than they would have been. They live in conditions which no retired person should endure in an advanced industrial society. They have to suffer the misery and humiliation of poverty. They are unlikely to agree that the Prime Minister's 10th anniversary in office should occasion celebration.

Nothing can be done about this year, but the damage could be limited if new clause 5 were accepted. We all know what will happen to new clause 5. If there was any justice or any feeling of fairness, the Government would ensure that the poorest pensioners never again had no increase, or just a pittance. The new clause reflects the feeling of pensioners who are adversely affected and the large majority of people who, however they vote, know that it is wrong and unjust to penalise and harm pensioners as the Government are.

Mr. Tony Banks: I support new clause 5. Like others, I feel frustration and disbelief when Ministers and Conservative Members allow circumstances such as these to develop and to continue once they know they exist.

I hold my advice surgery every Friday and I am invariably left on Friday evenings with a feeling of wonderment that people can exist from day to day. Of course, we may see the most extreme cases. We do not see the generality, but it is those extreme cases who should concern us most. They exist in some number. We do not whip ourselves up into some synthetic anger on this issue. We do not delude ourselves. This is not propaganda which has been dreamed up to embarrass the Government. These are real cases involving real people. It is the reality of everyday life in the London borough of Newham.

Many hon. Members are not here tonight. Many are having good dinners. I do not begrudge anybody a good dinner. What I resent is the fact that people who are having such good dinners will come in and use their votes to deny good dinners to others.

I am not trying to score cheap party political points by pointing out how few Conservative Members are present. There should be more Opposition Members present, but we can point the finger at the Government because they take the decisions. Conservative Members are responsible for the situation in our constituencies and they allow it to persist. That is why we have the right to point the finger at the Conservative Benches and ask "Where are they? Why are they not here to defend their own constituencies?" If they disagree with us, think that we are alarmist, misleading the House or making it up, or if they can say, "On the contrary, in my constituency everyone is absolutely delighted with the new benefit regime and no one is any the worse off under the new system"—if they can put their hands up and say that that is an honest statement of the truth we shall listen to them. But they are not here. Perhaps many of them are absent because they do not want to hear the facts. They want to keep their consciences clear and do not want to hear about the realities of life for so many millions of our fellow citizens in Britain today. That is why I have drawn attention to the absence of Conservative Members.

I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security is a decent man, and that perplexes me. He cordially received me and some people from the actors' union Equity so that we could explain a particular problem that actors are experiencing because of the change in the legislation and he courteously listened to what we had to say. I have no animus against the Minister, but I want to know whether he reads letters from individuals, and whether those letters touch his heart. They certainly touch our hearts, but the difference between us and the Government for the time being is that the Government can do something about it. All we can do is fulminate and say to the Government, "Surely you must realise how much suffering you are causing", and ask Ministers and Conservative Members to do something about it.

I feel that I am speaking in great hope but with no real expectation. When the Division is called, they will all come back from the bars, the dinners they are being bought outside, or the dinners that they are buying here and they will vote without knowing or being interested in what the arguments were, and the suffering in my constituency and in constituencies represented by Labour and Conservative Members will continue. Unlike the Conservative party, the Opposition are at least prepared to do something about it.

Mr. Battle: The contrast between the debate on new clause 5 and the previous debate is the absence of Conservative Members who are prepared to tell us how wealthy everyone is in Britain. It may be that they do not wish to hear the other side, but during the debate about child benefit they were keen to defend the tax cuts and the illusion that everyone on benefit was well protected. But that is not the reality.

One element that has been neglected in the debate is the time gap—the fact that the upratings are worked out in the Autumn Statement and the pension levels are set months

[Mr. Battle]

ahead of the March Budget statement when the taxes are changed. There is a six-month lag, so this year the benefits were uprated taking into account the rate of inflation of the previous October—5·9 per cent. When the pensioners receive the money from this April, inflation is 7·9 per cent., so pensioners lose out from the first week simply because of the inflation figure. If anyone feels that that is not important, they should remember that it means that a single pensioner loses 43p a week and a pensioner couple lose 71p a week. As my hon. Friends have reminded the House, I am sure that we are all aware that people on very low incomes keep account of every penny because they have to make ends meet. Because they have to pay the price for the cuts, they can certainly do the arithmetic. They know that their income is reducing because when they go to the shops they cannot get what they could get the previous week, and that should be taken into account before Conservative Members simply suggest that the average figure should be used to work out incomes and everyone is doing fine under the benefit system.

As was made clear in the reply to a parliamentary question that I tabled, had pensions been increased every year in line with earnings, as was done before the present Government came to office, a single pensioner would receive £49·30 a week and a pensioner couple would receive £79 a week. Before this year's uprating, pensioners had already suffered two hidden losses. After the uprating a single pensioner receives £43·60, yet it is interesting to compare that figure with what the Government consider pensioners should receive, as expressed in the income support applicable amounts—£48·60, or £5 more than the basic pension. In other words, in their calculation of benefit figures, the Government accept that the pension is underpaid.

One million pensioners live below the poverty line, a further 2 million live at the minimum level of income support and a further 3 million live only 40 per cent. above that minimum level. A total of some 6 million pensioners —three fifths of all British pensioners—live on or near the margins of poverty. It is no wonder that many pensioners are now writing to Members of Parliament and demanding a fair deal.

If Conservative Members are convinced that we are drawing attention to hard cases that do not bear any relation to the structure of the benefits system, will the Minister spell out how many pensioners living on or below the poverty line would benefit from an uprating in line with inflation? I do not apologise for citing a case. A pensioner in my constituency—I shall refer to her as Mrs. J—receives a total weekly income of £51·24, and it has been at that level since November 1987 due to a payment of transitional allowance in April 1988 of £7·19 to protect the additional allowance she had been receiving due to her diabetes. This year, although her bills have gone up, her money remains the same as she loses the £2·04 from her transitional addition. When we take up constituency cases we write to the Department of Social Security, and I received the following reply:

"Thank you for your letter . . . Mrs. J . . . is currently receiving a combined payment of Retirement Pension and Income Support amounting to £51·24 per week, calculated as follows:

Personal Allowance	£33·40
Pensioner Premium	£10·65
Transitional Addition	£7·19
	£51·24

. . . Expenses like a special diabetic diet are no longer separately itemised and added to an individual claimant's benefit, and I am afraid Mrs. J . . . will not be entitled to any additional benefit even though she now has to pay for special foodstuffs."

The letter goes on to explain how the transitional addition was a temporary cushion to which she is no longer entitled.

At the end of the letter is the statement:

"I hope this explains the situation to your satisfaction; I am sorry my reply could not be more favourable to Mrs. J."

Will the Under-Secretary tell us how long the phrase

"I am sorry my reply could not be more favourable"

will be logged into the word processor used to reply to the letters sent to him week after week? Hundreds of our constituents come to us spelling out in fine detail how much income they have lost per week. The person at the DSS may be sorry about it, but our constituents have to make do. They have to visit the same shops and purchase their goods with less money. For those claiming housing benefit the problems are the same. A total of 40 per cent. of those claiming the transitional addition lost out on 10 April this year.

There is a gentleman in my constituency who spends about 20 per cent. of his working hours trying to tackle forms and write to the Glasgow unit. He was asked to fill in and return a form for his pension increase even before the social security office could work out what he was entitled to. Therefore, he missed out because he missed the deadline. He lost a further £2 last week but was told that he could receive £2·05 for an original loss of £6·50 if he filled in another form. The people I represent are tired of filling in complicated forms to try to keep their incomes at the same level.

The Minister may say that Opposition Members have again quoted from a few letters and that they are isolated, difficult cases, but we could quote from such letters thousands of times. Taken together, they demonstrate the flaws in the structure of the social security system put together by the Government. A structural fault is pricing many pensioners down into poverty. The holes in the safety net are so large that thousands of pensioners are sinking through it.

In the previous debate Conservative Members suggested that there is a trickle down of wealth to everyone at the bottom. That is not so. It is not the case that, as one Conservative Member suggested, the average wage will pull everybody up. The incomes of those most in need of protection are falling behind weekly. Tonight we have an opportunity to do something about that for next year. We have an opportunity to ensure that those in need receive some basic justice.

9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I know that there is concern among hon. Members that not all their constituents will have received an increase in benefits at this uprating. I also realise that there are understandable worries about hard cases such as those that hon. Members have used to illustrate their arguments.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked how long I spend reading letters and when I last read any. I spent about four or five hours yesterday reading letters because I receive many of them. They were not all about transitional payments; in fact such letters were in a minority. However, I read them. As the hon. Gentleman suggested, many of them make hard and painful reading, but no more so than many of the other letters I receive. I reflect upon the letters that my predecessor would have been reading before the changes were introduced last April and I am convinced that many of the individuals who wrote those letters will have been helped by the changes. It is necessary to see the changes that occurred last April in that balanced way. There are difficult cases and I do not seek to dismiss them or push them to one side. However, the social security system is designed to tackle many difficulties and transitional payments and those in receipt of them are not always the most difficult cases.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) quoted some cases. He said that if one makes an assessment of the inflation rate it seems that on present estimates about 200,000 people will still be on transitional payments after the uprating. He ased me to consider the position of the disabled who will have no increase to look forward to for some years. The hon. Gentleman forgets that in October there will be an increase in income support rates for disabled persons over 60 years of age. As I said during social security questions last week, we shall keep all the premiums under review and act if pressure on a particular group of claimants becomes manifest.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) complained about the absence of Conservative Members. It is worth putting on record that when he made those observations four Labour Back Benchers were present, of whom he was one. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was open enough to acknowledge that, so I acknowledge his honesty.

Mr. Kirkwood: I have just finished digesting the Minister's earlier remark that the Government can review the levels of flat-rate premiums if the need arises. Is the Department actively trying to identify categories that are suffering particular hardship? If so, will he be prepared to make a statement at a later stage?

Mr. Lloyd: We review the categories from statistical information and information about individuals. All the examples that we are given, which we read, form a picture. The fact that we shall be improving premiums in two cases this October shows that monitoring has an effect. We shall continue to consider the information available to us, and where it is evident that there is pressure on a particular group we shall act accordingly.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North referred to price increases, especially fuel price increases. Over the past five years, electricity and gas charges have fallen in real terms, which has benefited those on supplementary benefit and income support. I remind him that in the years after 1979 supplementary benefit increased by 5 per cent. above the rate of inflation. It was a more generous benefit than when the Labour party left office. The total amount paid in supplementary benefit was redirected to income support last April.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West for saying that I listened courteously to the small delegation that he brought to see me. I took full note of what was said, and he will find that the arguments that were put will be reflected in the guidance that is issued to local benefit officers. I confirm what I said to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire that we shall take note of the pressure points that have been mentioned this evening by hon. Members.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Minister intend to comment on the four cases that I brought to the House's attention, in three of which there was no increase and in the other an increase of only 23p for reasons explained by the local DSS office? Will the Minister comment on information from the Library that if the pension had been increased in line with earnings since 1979 a married person would be £17·55 and a single person £11·10p a week better off?

Mr. Lloyd: That set of figures is frequently produced at Question Time and the Opposition repeatedly make the point that state retirement pensions increased faster under the Labour Government. This Government respond, more convincingly, by saying that, overall, pensioners' incomes have increased much faster than under the Labour Government. It is total incomes that are of interest, not any special part of income.

Mr. Battle: How many pensioners have to live solely on state pensions? That factor obviously affects the hon. Gentleman's statement. Does he suggest that the pensioners with supplementary incomes other than the state pension, the richer pensioners, get richer? The poorer pensioners are obviously worse off.

Mr. Lloyd: From memory, about 1·7 million pensioners are on income support. I have been asked how many of those are getting their full increase this year. The answer is 1·2 million. To do the sum for the hon. Gentleman, that leaves 300,000 pensioners who will get an increase in part and 200,000 who will get no increase this year.

Mr. Winnick: The poorest.

Mr. Lloyd: They will not be the poorest. That is where the hon. Gentleman misapprehends what the changes do. Pensioners with transitional additions will have had incomes from income support above the incomes of those coming on to income support since last April.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North asked me to comment on particular cases. I do not have the details of all of them, and it would be wrong to comment on them individually. The hon. Gentleman made an observation about the special addition for the diabetic diet. We would in any case have had to review—as would a Labour Government—those special additions that were failing to reach all the people who might have qualified for them. They were complex, and considerable knowledge was needed to know what to apply for. Medical opinion makes it clear that a diet suitable for diabetics is no more expensive than a sensible, healthy diet for someone who is not a diabetic. It would therefore have been right to look again at those additions.

It is essential to keep the whole issue and the particular cases which have been raised in proportion and context, real though they are. The majority of income support claimants will gain and have gained at uprating. We estimate that 73 per cent.—nearly 3·25 million—will receive their full increase and that about 610,000, or 14 per cent., will receive a partial increase. That will leave about

[Mr. Lloyd]

600,000 whose benefit will stay the same. After the uprating in 1990, we estimate that rather fewer than 200,000 claimants will still need this protection—a tiny minority of the millions of social security benefit recipients who will get increases.

There are important reasons for reducing transitional protection at the annual uprating. There is the question of resources. As hon. Members are well aware, our aim is to target help on those groups identified as having the greatest need. Transitional protection is expected to have cost some £200 million in its first year. By its nature, it is poorly targeted as it reflects the inequities of the old scheme. To continue to pay protection indefinitely would not be a good use of resources.

I shall also say, as the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) expected me to do, that there is a question of fairness. Claimants with protection are necessarily better off than those in similar circumstances who claimed after the start of the new scheme and who do not have access to protection. It would be wrong to perpetuate that inequality between different groups of claimants.

9.15 pm

That is not to say that important improvements should not be made in particular circumstances. I have already emphasised that on a couple of occasions and we have shown our readiness to listen to particular problems by, for example, providing special protection rules for severely disabled people going into certain types of respite care. This autumn's improvements for older and disabled pensioners who are entitled to income support will be welcomed. We believe that they are in special need of extra help and they will be exempted from the normal transitional protection rules. Although I am unable to accept this general relaxation to the transitional protection rules, we are looking carefully at the different categories and how they are affected. What I have said shows that we are prepared to act.

I am also pleased to be able to announce a specific improvement for a certain group of people who try to become independent of public funds. Hon. Members, especially those who served on the Committee, will be aware of an amendment to the Bill, brought forward in Committee, to remove a disincentive to work for a trial period by amending the transitional protection provisions. The Government consider it crucial that people who want to work should not be discouraged from doing so. We have, therefore, introduced some special rules to enable certain people to take a job for a trial period without incurring the risk of benefit sanctions if they leave their job voluntarily within a specified period. The new rules do not extend to transitional protection. We promised to look at this limitation and I can now tell the House that steps will be taken, through regulations, to ensure that the people to whom these work easements apply will not lose their transitional protection.

As I said at the outset, I appreciate that there are some hard cases and hon. Members have understandably and properly raised them this evening. I do not want to make light of them or to dismiss them. However, it must be said that all those who have transitional protection are, by definition, receiving more than those in the same general circumstances. Erosion of this protection does no more than move them towards the same level.

It would not have been possible to make the radical changes to our benefit system, which were so badly needed, without there being losers as well as gainers. We should not lose sight of the fact that in the changeover from supplementary benefit to income support, the number of gainers exceeded the number of losers. Of the 60 per cent. estimated to have gained in cash terms, the average gain was £3·85, not counting the sum that was built in for compensation for 20 per cent. of rates. Some 600,000 are expected to have gained more than £5 and another 1 million are expected to have gained between £2 and £5.

The new system is simpler, making it easier to administer and, more importantly, easier to claim. It is better targeted to groups whose need is greatest, such as the sick, the disabled and families with young children. It is also fairer between individuals in similar circumstances. We always recognised that the transition from the old system to the new would be uncomfortable and sometimes painful for the minority who lost. Such a choppy period, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said, would be inevitable if the changes he seeks were made. That is why we introduced transitional protection, which cushions reductions at the point of change. But it is an essential part of the much needed improvement to our system that those transitional additions should be reduced as personal circumstances change and as benefits are generally uprated. I ask the House to reject the new clause.

Mr. Robin Cook: By leave of the House, I want to respond briefly to the Minister. I begin by welcoming the fact that he complimented hon. Members on a serious and moving debate five times in his reply, appearing vaguely embarrassed about what he had to read to the House.

In the light of our debate, I regret that the Minister should again have taken refuge in quoting the numbers on who came out better on the cash transfer from the old system to the new. As he will know, that has been utterly discredited as a way of measuring the change. He should be measuring those who came out better in real terms and those who came out worse off in real terms.

Perhaps it is worth stressing that point because the immense irony of the figures claimed by Ministers last April is that every single one of the cases described in this debate would be corralled in the 88 per cent. who Ministers told us last year would be no worse off or would be better off as a result of the changes. I defy Ministers to explain to those who have written to me and my hon. Friends that they are no worse off as a result of last year's changes.

The Minister challenged the statement by my hon. Friends that we are talking about people who are among the poorest. He said that they receive rather more in income support than others. That is true. They have a marginally higher income than others on income support, but they have a higher income because they have higher costs. They still have the costs; they now no longer have the income to meet those costs.

The Minister's observation that there is no extra cost in suffering from diabetes suggests to me that some damage has been done by the separation of the Departments of Health and Social Security. Perhaps it is possible to cope with a diet for a diabetic with the same amount that one would pay for a sensible healthy diet for an average person, but the trouble is that income support payments do not provide for a sensible healthy diet for an average person, and certainly not for a diet for a diabetic.

The Minister has enlightened us in one respect. He has confirmed that next April 200,000 pensioners and other claimants can expect no uprating in their benefits. Their incomes will be frozen at exactly the same level as the claimants first received in April 1987 and half those claimants can expect their benefits to be frozen again in 1991. That cannot be acceptable. I regret that the Minister chose to make resources one of his defences. It would cost a beggarly £30 million to extend uprating to that category. Only last month in the Budget the Government confirmed that they are sitting on a record surplus of £14,000 million. If Ministers tell us that they cannot find £30 million to assist this group, although they recognise that the cases make hard and painful reading, their arguments deserve to be treated with contempt, and we shall vote against them.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 171, Noes 299.

Division No. 172] **[9.21 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 6

Income Related Benefits

"(1) In paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 2 to the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987, after the words '(applicable amounts and polygamous marriages)' there shall be inserted the words 'except that, for this purpose, any person aged less than 25 to whom any paragraph in Part II of Schedule 1A applies or would apply if he were aged 16 and had not reached the relevant date determined under regulation 13A(3)(b) shall be treated as if he were aged 25'.

(2) In paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 2 to the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987, after the words '17(a) and (b)' there shall be inserted the words 'except that, for this purpose, any person aged less than 25 to whom any paragraph in Part II of Schedule 1A to the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 applies, or would apply if he were aged 16, claiming income support and had not reached the relevant date determined under regulation 13A(3)(b) of those regulations, shall be treated as if he were aged 25'.".—*[Mr. Flynn.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 106, in clause 10, in page 8, line 4, at end add—

"(3) In section 22 of the 1986 Act (income related benefits) after subsection (8) there shall be inserted—

'(9) In relation to income support and housing benefit the applicable amount for a person in board and lodging accommodation shall include an amount in respect of his being a person in board and lodging accommodation.

(10) For the purposes of this section "board and lodging" accommodation means—

(a) accommodation provided to the claimant or, if he is a member of a family, to him or any other members of his family, for a charge which is inclusive of the provision of that accommodation and at least some cooked or prepared meals which are both prepared and consumed in that accommodation or associated premises; or

(b) accommodation provided in a hotel, guest-house, lodging-house or other similar establishment; or where facilities for the preparation of food are inadequate to the needs of that person.

(11) Regulations may prescribe the circumstances in which the facilities for the preparation of food are deemed to be inadequate.'.".

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This issue raised the most passionate feelings in Committee, when we heard heartbreaking stories of young people who were suffering as a result of the social security changes. The purpose of new clause 6 is to remove some of the worst excesses of the Government's calamitous changes, which have made tens of thousands of the most vulnerable young people into outcasts of the social security system. Last week we generously and gratefully acknowledged the speed with which the Government had moved. They promised in Committee that they would put some improvements on the fast track, and, in fact, they delivered some improvements within a few days of the final Committee sitting. However, while we are happy about the speed of the Government's action, we are less happy about the substance of the changes, which are not adequate to meet the problem.

A large group of young people in this country are gratuitously exposed to poverty. The object of the new clause is very modest. What we seek to do is to extend the rates of income support and housing benefit for the over-25s to people under 25 in the following categories: those who are married; those who were previously in care, and are not living with their parents or anyone acting in the place of their parents; those who are living away from the parental home, in accommodation that they entered as part of a programme of rehabilitation or resettlement, to avoid physical or sexual abuse, or because of mental or physical handicap or illness; and those living away from the parental home because the parents cannot afford to support them as they are chronically sick or disabled, or because they are in prison or prohibited from entering the country. In short, these are the very young people who are married, who do not have a parental home to which they can safely return, and who therefore are obliged to pay for their own accommodation, whether as boarders or as householders.

At present, the existence of this group of people is recognised only to the extent of allowing those aged 16 to 17 in these categories to receive income support during the three months child benefit extension period.

As a result of the great pressures that have been exerted on the Government by the Opposition, many organisations, local authorities and hon. Members on both sides of the Standing Committee on the Bill, the small concessions announced by the Minister on 13 March came into effect. Again, these affect only those aged 16 to 17. From next July, if they happen to qualify for income support—which most of them do not—they will get the rate that is applicable to those between 18 and 24. In other words, they will receive £27·50 a week instead of only £20·80. That is still £7·40 below the normal rate of £34·90 payable to people 25 or older.

We must question the basis of having separate rates for young people and it is worth looking at the Government's justification for it. When they introduced the lower rate of income support for under-25s, the grounds were explained in the 1985 Green Paper, "Reform of Social Security". It stated:

"it is clear that at the age of 18 the majority of claimants are not fully independent and that the great majority of claimants above age 25 are . . . In 1983 nearly 90 per cent. of all claimants over 25 were getting the higher householder rate. By contrast the clear majority of claimants under 25 were living in someone else's household. The Government have concluded that an appropriate dividing line is age 25."

The Minister nods. It is simplicity which the Government seek but, unfortunately, there are casualties of simplicity. The young people involved, like all other categories forced into simplified little boxes, do not fit neatly into them. The fact that many claimants under 25 were independent householders, whether through choice or necessity, was ignored altogether. All under-25s were to get a lower rate of benefit, regardless of their circumstances. Boarders under 25, as well as householders, were affected and until this month they were subjected to time limits which meant that their board and lodging charges were met for only a few weeks, after which they received only the basic under-25 income support rate. Under the new arrangements introduced this month, income support no longer covers board and lodging charges and the under-25 rate applies from the start of the claim. Despite the abolition of the time limits, board and lodging accommodation will remain out of reach of most claimants in this age group. They will no longer be able to afford it, even temporarily. Amendment No. 106, which is coupled with the new clause, deals with that.

The aim of new clause 6 is specifically modest. It aims to be practical and acceptable to the Government. It does not seek to abolish the under-25 benefit rate entirely, as we should like, although there is a strong case for doing that. It does not even seek to abolish it for all young people who are living independently, for which an even stronger case can be made. The new clause concentrates exclusively on those who set up home because they are married or do not have parental homes to which to return, even if they wish to do so. There is no justification for paying a lower rate of benefit to people in those circumstances simply because they are under 25.

We heard a great deal in Committee about care leavers. Each year approximately 8,000 young people leave care. The majority of them have no suitable parental home. Usually they have not lived in a parental home for many years. Research shows that about 70 per cent. of our young care leavers live on their own compared with less than 1 per cent. of the general population of the same age. Successive surveys also show that young people who have left care are over-represented among the homeless.

Centre Point in London estimated that 25 per cent. of the homeless that it looks after and knows of previously came from care. A Government report has suggested that the figure is 33 per cent. Several local authorities have recently noted that they are having to keep young people in care longer or, on occasions, readmitting them into care —sometimes into inappropriate placements.

There has been a deluge of submissions from local authorities and local authority associations pointing out that there is an increasing problem. Some social services departments are now reporting that young people over 16 are seeking their assistance because they cannot return home, often as a result of abuse within their families. Many of them have waited until their 16th birthdays to leave home. The social services departments are reporting that most of those youngsters were unknown to them previously.

9.45 pm

Since the changes were announced on 13 March, we have received dozens of examples from Barnardos, the Association of Directors of Social Services, and the bodies representing local authorities. We have a wide choice of cases from which to choose. We could choose some

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

spectacular ones or some sad ones, often the result of mistakes and inefficiency, where young people have been left without any income at all. I will not quote those cases, but I shall cite the cases of two youngsters from the prosperous area of Canterbury, who have come to the attention of a small charity called Rented Accommodation for Teenagers. RAFT has cited two cases and told us how they will be affected. The cases are typical of the position of young people and they show what will happen to them after July.

The first case is Wilfred, who is 17 years old. He was thrown out of home by his unemployed stepfather last year after months of hostility that had threatened to break up his mother's marriage. After sleeping on friends' floors he went to RAFT, because his stepfather was adamant that he could not return and Wilfred believed that it was not safe to do so. After eight months with a family, under the supervision of the charity, Wilfred has progressed well and is ready for a place of his own.

The charity is negotiating with the city council to manage a few small units of accommodation to sublet to young people, whom it will continue to support. The rent and rates bill is £36·41 a week and Wilfred receives a training allowance of £28·50. He gets £23·02 housing benefit, leaving him with £15·11 for total weekly outgoings. He pays his first £3 travel costs to work, so that leaves £12·11 for food, electricity and clothes.

Following the Minister's announcement on 13 March, Wilfred will look forward to receiving £15·66 from July. That is a totally inadequate amount to meet all his needs.

The second example that the charity provides is that of Tracy and, sadly, is a case that is typical of many others that we heard about in Committee and in a very moving press conference that was held afterwards.

Tracy was 16 years old when she went to RAFT as an alternative to going into care, which she did not want, partly because that would have disrupted her last year of school. She had alleged sexual assault by her father. She had been staying with a family, which was involved with the charity, while hoping to get back to her mother if her father was put in prison for the offence.

Following the transfer of board and lodging payments from the Department of Social Security to housing benefits at the city council, Tracy, being on a YTS placement, has £2·20 a week to pay for her fares to work, her clothing, her toiletries and her entertainment. As she has to pay the first £3 of her fares, she has minus 80p for all personal expenses. Her mother, who—again not unusually in these circumstances—blames Tracy in part for the family tensions, gives her no money.

Following the announcement on 13 March, from July Tracy should receive the princely sum of £2·50 a week for toiletries, for clothing and for entertainment.

Those figures have been verified. Those income levels are punitive to those young people who have been victims for long periods.

It is worth comparing the benefits received by those young people with the average pocket money enjoyed by children in families where everything is found, including food, accommodation and clothing. The average pocket money for a 12-year-old, according to a survey conducted by the Halifax building society, is £2·30 a week while for a 16-year-old it is £8·99. Therefore, the average 12-year-old receives in pocket money more than Tracy does after a full week's work on YTS. The new clause covers those who, in the Government's view, are essentially, necessarily and without any possible escape, living away from their parental homes.

The Government should consider the sobering example of what is happening in the United States—reference has already been made to that country. The changes that have taken place in Britain in the past few years parallel those that have occurred in the United States, which is suffering a peculiar anguish of 3 million tent people, homeless, itinerant street dwellers who have been rejected by the state and who are despised by society. Many of those people started life in care and many suffer from all kinds of inadequacies, especially from forms of mental illness. President Bush has said that they represent the nation's shame. There are 3 million of them. They are the walking wounded, the casualties of a social security system that has been wrecked by the same mean-spirited forces of malice and ignorance and neglect that have corrupted the judgment of the Government. Visitors to the United States ask how unimaginable wealth can live as a close neighbour to such poverty.

Earlier today, the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) asked what would happen if someone from another planet came to study our social security system. A year ago someone from another world, the Third world, came to London. Mother Theresa wept on the streets of our capital. In a society where the average family is as rich, or has command over as many resources, as a Tudor monarch, we consciously fail our more susceptible young people. They are the very people who have been spurned by their parents from early childhood, as well as those who have endured the long, hideous nightmare of parental abuse. From birth, many of them have been cheated by nature or short-changed by life. They are the embittered, bewildered, frightened victims of society who deserve better than the Hobson's choice that we give them of poverty, or drugs, begging, crime and prostitution.

I appeal to the Government and to the House to listen to the voices of good people who are crying out to us to stop adding to the physical and emotional turmoil of adolescence the cruel, ugly and unnecessary burden of destitution.

Mr. Kirkwood: I support the new clause that has been ably moved by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). I wish to address my remarks to amendment No. 106 which stands in my name and which deals with a slightly different but related topic—the financial plight of people who must live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The amendment seeks to provide a special level of income support for people living in such accommodation and similar lodgings. In consultation with housing pressure groups, particularly Shelter, I am extremely worried that the changes for boarders introduced a fortnight ago on 10 April could have a potentially disastrous effect on the health and well-being of homeless families.

The changes effectively abolish the so-called "eating out" allowances which families in bed-and-breakfast have relied upon to supplement their incomes. Many families in such accommodation have totally inadequate cooking facilities and are forced to exist on take-away food which, as we all know, is extremely expensive.

It is right that the House should spend some time considering the changes with a view to putting right some of the anticipated difficulties before they cause more trouble than they already have. On 10 April, housing costs for boarders—those living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, hotels, in lodgings and in so-called "supportive lodgings"—were switched away from income support to housing benefit. Residents of hostel accommodation will be transferred to that new regime in October.

These changes have been designed to rationalise the situation and to place boarders on the same footing as people in self-contained and permanent accommodation. Until April and under the old system boarders received a higher rate of income support, including a payment for meals or the eating out allowance to which I referred earlier. That was designed to compensate for the lack of proper cooking facilities in many bed-and-breakfast establishments. Eating out allowances have now been abolished, so boarders receive the same rates of income support and personal allowances as all other claimants and they may also have to meet certain amenity charges out of their own income support that are not catered for by housing benefits.

It is worth considering the definition of "boarder". For social security purposes, the term "boarder" is not related to security of tenure or to the occupation of any particular type of accommodation. For example, there are circumstances in which an assured or an assured shorthold English tenant, as well as licensees, can all be considered as boarders and accordingly get support. Income support regulations state that a boarder is a person who does not live with a close relative and pays an exclusive charge for accommodation and some meals or lives in a hotel, guest house, lodging house or similar establishment. Essentially the test is commercial.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is the hon. Gentleman reading a brief?

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman says that I am reading a brief. I am reading very carefully the representations put forward by Shelter because they are technical and difficult to understand. I make no apology for doing that, because these changes will have serious financial effects. Many people have to live in this sort of accommodation. I am therefore anxious for the House to hear about the details of the old system and of the new system.

Mr. Corbyn: Would it not be helpful for Conservative Members who are making half-baked remarks to read the details of the Bill so that they might realise how horrific it is for young people who are seeking to live independently rather than being put in danger of risk by this proposal?

Mr. Kirkwood: I believe that that would be a considerable advance, but I do not think it is likely to happen. I was saying that the test of who and who is not a boarder is essentially commercial. Two of the clauses in my proposed amendment No. 106 seek to rearrange the definition of a boarder. I refer particularly to the definition of "supportive lodgings". As I can find no definition of that term in the regulations, I should be obliged if the Minister of State could supply information on that. For example, the Department of Social Security intends to embrace adult care placements. The case of someone placed with an ordinary family which provides a degree of personal care and assistance is to be included in that category. I do not believe that such schemes have to be registered by the local authorities, and I am worried about this aspect. I may be wrong, and I hope that the Minister will clarify the situation.

The changes that affect people's incomes which were introduced on 10 April altered the previous situation which allowed a weekly income support payment to be paid to a boarder made up of three basic elements: an accommodation charge; a meals eating out allowance; and a personal allowance. Under the old system, the accommodation charge covered the weekly cost of board and lodgings. The meals allowance covered the cost of extra meals not included in the weekly charges, and that was made up either of the cost of the meals or the daily charges set out—£1·10 for breakfast, £1·55 for lunch, and £1·55 for an evening meal. A total weekly allowance, excluding breakfast, amounted to £21·70. That is a substantial sum on which people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation substantially relied.

In addition, there are personal allowances. That for a single person is £10·30, and that was doubled for a couple and less for dependent children. Any person who satisfied the conditions for income support premium would have received the full sum of £11·50 for a personal allowance. The personal allowances for those in bed-and-breakfast accommodation were smaller.

On top of that there were ceilings on board and lodging charges and accommodation charge and meals allowance were subject to regional maximums. In my constituency, it was £55 and in London it is £70 for a single person. The sums for those under 25 were subject to time limits and that caused all sorts of legal difficulties and the Government kept having to change the rules of the game. Boarders were not eligible to receive additional income support payments.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered, That at this day's sitting, the Social Security Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), again considered.

Question again proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Kirkwood: From 10 April, boarders will receive an income support personal allowance and housing benefit. That will lead to a substantial drop in income for most boarders, particularly homeless families in bed and breakfast. Under income support, personal allowances are flat rate and are paid regardless of differences in personal circumstances. The premiums will be paid where appropriate, but will not be adequate to compensate for the loss of eating out allowance. Income could be further reduced if families are expected to pay any immediate amenity charges to their hotel.

The new rate of income support personal allowance is £20·80 for a single person aged under 18. There are higher rates for those between 18 and 24 and a rate of £34·90 for those aged 25 or over. The lone parent is expected to live on £20·80, a couple both aged under 18 on £41·60 and a couple with at least one over-18-year-old £54·80, with additions for children or young people.

I understand that the time limit for boarders under 25 has been abolished. Income support changes are severe enough but, taken together with housing benefit changes,

[Mr. Kirkwood]

they are worse. There are two kinds of housing benefit changes. First, the rent allowance will be applied to private or housing association tenants and there will be different rent rebates for council tenants. Housing benefit will cover only eligible rent and rates, so that some charges included in rents will be excluded when calculating benefit. These charges must be met from the weekly income support. As if these housing benefit changes were not enough, the ineligible charges also include 20 per cent. poll tax charges and 20 per cent. general rate and water rate charges.

These changes in the housing benefit allowances and rebates will have a severe effect. In addition, local authorities must make weekly deductions for meals when paying rent allowances or rebates. For members of the household aged over 16, deductions of £12·50 have to be made. For those aged under 16, the deduction is £6·25. Is addition, there are fuel deductions. If one room is occupied, £4·20 has to be deducted for heating, hot water and lighting, and for more than one room the sum is £7. In addition, there are other services, the most common being those for cleaning and laundry, for which deductions will be made.

When we examine how the changes will affect the income of boarders, we have to examine the effect that the changes will have when the boarders are split into those who are receiving either rent allowances or rent rebates. In the former group, claimants who move into bed-and-breakfast accommodation after 10 April will be referred to the rent officer, who will assess whether they are paying an unreasonably high rent for housing benefit subsidy purposes and also whether the accommodation is too large.

The space standards applied by rent officers are fairly restrictive—children of the same sex may have to share a bedroom. Local authorities will receive no subsidy for housing benefit paid out above the rent officer's assessment. Some local authorities will therefore be unable or will refuse to pay housing benefit on rent at that level, and boarders will be left to meet the difference themselves. I understand that a 50 per cent. subsidy is payable in some circumstances when some of the housing benefit regulations apply.

Rent rebate claimants will not be referred to the rent officer in that way. It must be noted that the DSS has confirmed that housing benefit claims from homeless families that are placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation by local authorities will legally be treated as rent rebates. That is to say that, as with council tenants, rents will be paid by homeless families to a local authority, which will be entitled to make a reasonable charge for accommodation.

These cases cannot be referred to the rent officer as can those involving private tenants, but the DSS has announced that subsidy limits are to be imposed by using the rent threshold limits which were brought into force in 1988. They will continue to apply to tenancies which commence before this April. When a local authority places a family in bed-and-breakfast accommodation outside its area, the threshold that applies is that of the placing authority. Authorities will receive maximum subsidies up to the rent threshold and thereafter only a 25 per cent. subsidy.

Sir William Clark *rose*——

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman need not bother to interrupt to say that I am reading and to complain. He can make his own speech. I make absolutely no apology for ensuring that some of the details of these changes are put on the record accurately.

Sir William Clark: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not a tradition of the House that, although a Back Bencher can refer to notes, he should not read his speech verbatim? The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for some time and he has been reading. Has the tradition been changed?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The hon. Gentleman knows that there is no Standing Order that governs speeches. I have noticed that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) has been making copious use of his notes which, according to tradition, is not done in the House. If, however, he insists on making copious use of his notes, there is nothing that the Chair can do about it. I hope that he will bring his remarks to a speedy conclusion.

Mr. Kirkwood: Of course I shall respond to that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have three other points to make. I hope that the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) will listen carefully.

A couple with two children—I am reading, carefully—aged nine and seven will lose £31·90 a week as a result of the changes of a fortnight ago. Secondly, a couple with four children aged three, seven, 11 and 12 will lose £51·20—carefully read from the notes—and, thirdly, a person aged 19 will lose £4·60 a week under the new system. That also is carefully read from the notes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands the effect that the changes will have on such people.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I want to be brief. The case for new clause 6 and amendment No. 106 has been made very eloquently.

Many young people aged 16 and 17, through no fault of their own, cannot live with their parents, because they do not have parents, because they have parents who have not acknowledged them for many years or because they have been rejected by a step-parent on remarriage. An increasing number of marriages break down. Remarriages take place and young people are rejected by step-parents. Very often, the dominant male insists that a young person leaves home. Such young people are very vulnerable.

I read the figures very carefully and found them quite convincing. Many young people simply do not have enough to live on. They do not have enough to feed themselves and they certainly do not have enough to clothe themselves or buy their own toiletries. Let us not mince words. Young people, particularly girls, have to provide certain essential toiletries. We are not talking about perfume behind the ears, although I believe that 16 to 17-year-olds are entitled to a little luxury.

As the mother of teenage children, I know how much they spend on hamburgers, tapes and detailed accessories when their food, accommodation, hot water and home comforts are provided. We have to examine seriously the amounts of money being made available to young people. I welcome the changes which have already been made, but, looking carefully at case studies which have been sent to us by various responsible bodies, we have to acknowledge that young people will be short of basic essentials,

including food. Unless we do something, those young people will get into serious trouble. They will have to turn to crime or prostitution to make ends meet. If they go to work, on the amount that they receive at present, they will not have enough money to pay their fares for the whole week, they will become poor employees and stand to lose their jobs through no fault of their own. We have to take the matter very seriously. It is our duty to address the situation and remedy the financial problems faced by many young people.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I shall not read copiously from my notes because for most of the time I cannot read my own handwriting. I have also put my finger on my glasses and cannot see out of them.

We are discussing a very serious subject, which I am sure most hon. Members have encountered in their surgery—the most vulnerable group of people in Britain today. To say that those young people have homes, accommodation or other support is nonsense. For any Administration to ignore the experience that has been drawn to their attention in the past few years, and the fact that those young people are vulnerable and independent in the sense that they are living in isolation and then to assume that they can get care, attention and resources from other sources is tantamount to criminality.

All right hon. and hon. Members must at some time have come face to face with cases which have been created by recent legislation. People say that the poor are with us all the time. Of course they are, but, unfortunately, various social security Bills in the past few years have created a new poverty for young people. All the voluntary groups and most local authorities have given chapter and verse to the suffering that continues today. Sometimes accommodation can be found. I am sure that we have all had cases for whom we have been delighted to find accommodation. At one time that would have been the end of the problem, but nowadays it is only the start. Often, those people are provided with four walls, a roof and a door, but nothing else. Many single payments have been abolished and other resources are no longer available.

We have all heard reports about key money, deposits and so on. In my constituency this morning a young man told me that he had found accommodation—I will check this with the Minister in writing—but that even the electricity board is asking for a deposit because he has never before been registered as a consumer and it wants some form of guarantee. That is yet another burden for people who are already in a mess.

10.15 pm

It is wrong to assume that, because of their age, young people can find income or resources from some other source. I do not think that new clause 6 goes far enough, but obviously we will support it. Whether young or old, people living independently and with no resources should receive equal treatment. Whether one is 16 or 30, the price of food and electricity is the same. To assume that for some strange reason a young person who has even less experience of how to manage can make do with fewer resources is beyond comprehension. In fact, it should be the other way round. Young people with no experience need extra support. They should not be fined or penalised because of their age.

There is a case in my constituency—I shall not dwell on it—of a 16 or 17-year-old girl who is pregnant. She was found accommodation—it is not very good, but it is better than nothing. Her general practitioner and the doctor dealing with her at the hospital insisted that she leave her previous house because she had been subjected to sexual abuse year after year. It is an impossible situation. However, just removing that young person from that house does not solve her problems. If anything, it creates more problems. Because of her young age, she does not qualify for the benefits that older people would receive automatically.

Last Wednesday, thanks to the Methodist Church, I had the privilege—if that is the right term—of visiting some London hostels. It was traumatic in many ways. The Methodist Church is doing a good job within its limitations. It wanted Members of Parliament from all parties to visit the hostels and I spent most of my time in Lambeth. Despite the love and care that the ordinary authorities and charitable organisations provide, there is no way that they can resolve all the problems. They are basically keeping the young people's heads just above water. The legislation is making matters worse. The plight of those people is desperate and I am sure that anyone who is aware of it, no matter how hard-hearted they may be, must be touched by it. They are the most vulnerable people in our society.

No one can deny that, although the caring services do a good job for such people, they do not have the necessary resources and should not have the ultimate responsibility. The legislation passed by the Government has been partly responsible for the problems and only the Government can change that. New clause 6 attempts to go some way along that road, but not as far as most of us would like. It is an extremely modest clause and I hope that the Government will read, understand and accept it. They should listen not just to me and my colleagues but to the voluntary organisations and other groups that have been pleading for months for some change which will help those in desperate need. We cannot justify passing legislation that allows young people to continue to exist in a living hell.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): It is significant that all we heard from Conservative Members was a point of pedantry rather than anything to do with the substance of these serious matters.

I support new clause 6, which was eloquently moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). I shall focus especially on the problems faced by 16 and 17-year-olds who have been robbed of every penny of income by the Government.

Mr. Favell: I have never heard so much rubbish. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a 16 or 17-year-old should be able to live in semi-luxury without training or trying to find a job? The Opposition, by encouraging this idleness, are not doing young people any favours whatever.

Mr. Wilson: I am delighted that I allowed the hon. Gentleman to intervene. I am reminded of the old maxim, "All you expect from a pig is a grunt." The hon. Gentleman eloquently gave the true views of Tory Members, and I hope that in the days and weeks before the county council elections his words will be well trailed around England and Wales. There spoke the true voice of Toryism. We shall hear later from the Minister for Social Security, the polite face of Toryism. It will be interesting to

[Mr. Wilson]

see whether he dissociates himself from those remarks. It will be interesting to hear whether the Minister for Social Security, who trails his wet reputation round the dinner tables of Kensington and Chelsea, shares his hon. Friend's views of 16 and 17-year-olds living in semi-luxury.

The Government have made a modest retreat on the treatment of some 16 and 17-year-olds. When I raised the subject in an Adjournment debate last December there was no evidence of any Government awareness of the need to retreat. On the contrary, the strong impression given by the Minister was that he was doing the 16 and 17-year-olds from whom he had robbed every penny of income a favour. He told the House that there was

"nothing more debilitating for the mass of youngsters leaving education and entering the adult world than to have automatically to depend on state benefits."

We were not talking then, and we are not now, about the mass of youngsters. By national standards, we are talking of relatively few youngsters. It is more debilitating for 16 and 17-year-old youngsters leaving education and entering the adult world to have no state benefit, no job, no training and not a penny of legal income on which to depend than a few pathetic pounds of state benefit on which to subsist.

The philanthropist Minister, who was saying that he was doing youngsters a favour, continued:

"I can think of no greater danger than for young people to be attracted to leave home and have the opportunity to live on state benefits and come into some sort of life in inner London or any of our other big cities and be exposed to the dangers, moral and otherwise, that can confront them."

The Minister is a positive salvationist, but I tell him that there is one bigger danger than having to live on state benefit in inner-London facing moral dangers—to live on no state benefit in inner-London or other big cities facing moral dangers.

Mr. Favell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilson: Get out of my road. Very well, I give way.

Mr. Favell: Is the hon. Gentleman honestly suggesting that an able-bodied person of 16 or 17 cannot get a job in central London? I could find that person a job within five minutes if he really wanted one.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Another little gem.

Mr. Wilson: Another little gem. It is on the record.

Mr. Battle: Conservative Members seem to think that youngsters have a life of semi-luxury on the streets of London. My hon. Friend may care to remind the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) of what happens. I bumped into a youngster and asked him why he was sleeping out in London. He said that he had a job but one reason why he had to live out was that he could not even raise the deposit to rent a flat. He had to work for eight weeks before he could get the income to rent a flat. Perhaps Conservative Members do not reflect on what is happening in our society.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend's point is well taken.

On 5 December the Minister went on very much in the same vein as the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell). He declared:

"All that young people have lost as a result of the implementation of the new arrangements is the option of doing nothing at the public's expense."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 146-47.]

That was and is a lie of Goebbelian proportions. In many parts of the country there is no option of work or training. The youngsters who have been robbed of every penny of their income and forced into dire circumstances have been treated callously. It is almost beyond belief that any society could treat its youngest and most vulnerable members in that way as they enter the adult world.

The consequences are all around us to be seen. Unfortunately, we cannot get statistics. Part of the Government's trick is that by depriving youngsters of a legal existence and making them ineligible for benefit, those people no longer have to be counted. It is a double benefit from the Government's point of view. Tens of thousands of youngsters who lost all entitlement to income when these measures were introduced no longer feature in the unemployment count. Every month we hear that unemployment has fallen by so many thousands, but, especially when there is a new wave of school leavers, the figures include many youngsters who have lost entitlement to benefit because they are 16 or 17. The Minister is responsible for that.

What is the position of 16 or 17-year-olds who find themselves without a penny of income? They seek advice, thinking that surely this cannot happen to them. Nine times out of 10, social security offices and others tell them that because they are 16 or 17 they have no means of appeal and no entitlement. In rare cases they are given the correct advice, which is that any 16 or 17-year-old can appeal on the ground of severe hardship. They will not normally get that advice from the offices for which the Minister is responsible. Those youngsters are presented with a 15-page form to fill in. I know of several youngsters who have made eloquent testimony of their circumstances and have described the poverty, misery and hopelessness in which they live, but, because they have failed to use the magic words "severe hardship", their applications are automatically rejected. That is a splendid trick for the Minister to pull on these 16 and 17-year-olds. Even if youngsters get through that 15-page form, the likelihood of their getting beyond that form is remote. The Government cynically count on that.

I urge all 16 and 17-year-olds who have been robbed by the Minister of every penny of their legal income to get the necessary information to lodge appeals on the ground of severe hardship. When, for some spurious reason, their appeals are turned down, as they will be, they should seek legal advice to challenge the grounds on which the decision was taken. Perhaps the trick can be turned back on the Minister: because those youngsters have been left without a penny of legal income, by definition they will qualify for legal aid. They should take their case to the courts and large numbers should challenge the Minister on his Department's actions. I hope that that piece of practical advice will go out to 16 and 17-year-olds.

10.30 pm

The vast majority of Conservative Members, unaware of what is happening in large parts of the areas that they represent and among large social groupings in those areas, will be unaware, too, of cases that have arisen. I want to cite one example from my constituency, to make the Minister aware of what his handiwork has meant in human terms. It concerns a 16-year-old who left school last August. He lived—as many do—in very poor circumstances. He came from a low-income, single-parent family struggling to make ends meet. He lived in an area

in which there are no YTS places and no pretence of YTS places so when the bridging allowance ran out he was not offered a YTS place, but he was disqualified from benefit. He became one of the tens of thousands of youngsters in Britain who are left without a penny of income.

After being disqualified from benefits, he made a mistake. The House will agree that 16-year-olds sometimes make mistakes and that they should pay for them with rather less harsh penalties than my constituent paid. When 16-year-olds at public school make mistakes, they are called jolly japes. This lad's mistake was to pilfer from his mother's purse. Perhaps 16-year-olds with no money and no access to money sometimes do things like that. He was put out of his family home in the extreme circumstances that I have described. He then lived rough—*[Interruption.]* I hear sniggers from the Tory Benches. He lived rough for several weeks—in hedgerows and in haylofts.

He became involved with a family of experienced criminals. He was then used, Fagin-like, to steal for his keep. That was in December and January. A few weeks ago, he was united with his mother and is back in the family home, still without a penny of income. He has now paid the price for his activities in December and January: he was taken to court and sentenced to three months' detention for the petty thieving offences from which, as the court recognised, he gained no personal benefit. He stole for his keep because he had no money and had no home. It was the Government who put him in that position.

All of that was utterly predictable. Any fool can see—and the Minister can see—that if one condemns tens of thousands of youngsters to living without a penny of income, many of them will, as night follows day, find themselves in circumstances that are a threat to their morals and to their well-being, but, above all, to the possibility of their ever having a decent life.

In the name of any humanity that may exist in Britain, give us an assurance tonight that no 16 or 17-year-old will be left in the streets or the hedgerows or the haylofts without a penny of income.

Mr. Corbyn: Tonight in London it is an ordinary wet miserable night. Earlier this evening I went to a meeting at the London School of Economics. On my way back, I counted the number of people getting ready to spend the night on the pavement in Arundel place, just in sight of the Savoy hotel, where a room costs £400 a night. Just before 9 o'clock there were already 12 people getting ready to spend the night in sight of the Savoy and just near the law courts.

When I go home there will be more than a dozen people begging for money outside Finsbury Park station near to where I live. There will be young people begging so that they can exist in this city.

Tomorrow, at a convent near my home, a pathetic stream of half a dozen or a dozen—it is sometimes more—will be asking the nuns for a cup of tea and a piece of bread and butter. That is a normal night and a normal day in this city at this time.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Savoy hotel. Some years ago, I was the chairman of a welfare committee in Camden. As such, I was in charge of a common lodging house in Parker street. The deputy head chef of the Savoy was one who went there from choice. He could certainly have chosen to go elsewhere.

Mr. Corbyn: I am not quite sure what that intervention adds to the sum total of human knowledge. The hon. Lady was not in her place earlier in the discussion. I was not talking about the chef at the Savoy. I was making a comparison between the poor people who sleep in the streets and the people who walk past them to spend £400 for one night in the Savoy hotel. If the hon. Lady does not understand the difference between what I was saying and what she is thinking, heaven help us all.

We have an appalling problem of homelessness and destitution among young people in London. My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) spoke about the plight of young people being forced into crime and all sorts of indignities to make ends meet. That is happening all the time in London. They are young people—some from London, some from outside London, some from institutions, and some from what one would call normal family homes. Eventually, the disputes with parents become worse and worse, because the flat is overcrowded, and because a younger child wants the bedroom. All the pressures and tensions build up, and we end up with young people out on the streets.

If they are out on the streets, sleeping rough and looking dishevelled, it is difficult for them to get a job. It is difficult to get a job if they have no address and they cannot say where they live in the first place. They get into a cycle of despair. The ways out of that cycle of despair are often crime, drugs, prostitution, and so on. That is happening now in this city. Complacent Conservative Members choose to ignore it, to wish it away, and to decide that it is the problem of a few feckless youths who are trying to fiddle the social security system. They are creating a crisis of unimaginable proportions.

If Conservative Members bother tonight to go to Waterloo station or Charing Cross and to walk around, they will not find that only old tramps sleep there. Often quite young people are there. They should go to Crisis at Christmas. They will find that every year a growing proportion of people there are under the age of 25. These are signs of a real crisis in our society.

What is the Government's response? They say that under 25-year-olds should be partly dependent on their parents and that, if they are trying to live independently, they should get less than those over the age of 25. The same Government are making large cuts by closing long-stay institutions of various sorts. In some ways, some of us welcome closures of long-stay institutions, provided that they are compensated for by real spending on real community care that gives real support, and provided that we do not ignore people and leave them to try to fend for themselves, often in a vulnerable situation.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Is my hon. Friend aware that, last year, Centrepoint, a charity in Soho in London, said that its research showed that, each year, 30,000 young people from the north of England come to London simply because there are no jobs in the north? They are trapped into lower-paid jobs in London where they cannot pay for their accommodation.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend made a valid and correct point. I and many other London hon. Members regularly meet young people in our surgeries. They have been unable

[Mr. Corbyn]

to get jobs in the north or other parts of the country—not through any fault or lack of effort on their part. Often, they have tried hard at school and at any educational opportunities that are offered to them.

Young people cannot get work so, not unreasonably, they come to London. Even if they can find jobs, which is difficult, they cannot find anywhere to live. They then go to Centrepoint where they are told that there are thousands like them and they cannot be helped. They traipse around advice bureaux, crisis centres and Members' surgeries. At every turn they are told "No".

All the London local authorities have appalling housing crises. On average every London borough has a waiting list of between 5,000 and 10,000. Those young people are not eligible to be rehoused under the homeless persons legislation unless they can be judged to be totally vulnerable, which many of them are. It is often claimed that they are intentionally homeless when they seek rehousing. Those young people either have to go back home to a part of the country where there is no work and where the family is often in such a tight spot that it cannot cope with the young person's return, or they end up trying to fend for themselves on the streets of London.

This Government are creating a generation of criminals by forcing people into crime because of the social conditions that prevail in this country. Conservative Members should consider what they are doing in relation to this particularly nasty piece of social security legislation which builds on something which was even nastier two years ago.

There is no shortage of money in this country. There is no shortage of resources to ensure that everyone has a roof over their heads and that every unemployed and homeless person has sufficient income to keep body and soul together. There is a political will not to provide it. That is the problem.

With regard to independent living, the 1985 Green Paper entitled "Reform of Social Security" states:

"it is clear that at the age of 18 the majority of claimants are not fully independent and that the great majority of claimants above the age 25 are . . . In 1983 nearly 90 per cent. of all claimants over 25 were getting the higher household rate. By contrast the clear majority of claimants under 25 were living in someone else's household. The Government have concluded that an appropriate dividing line is age 25."

If ever there were a self-fulfilling prophecy that is it. Of course the majority of young people are living in someone else's household—they cannot afford to live anywhere else. Sometimes they are more or less sleeping on floors. The Government have decided that the age of 25 should represent entitlement to a lower benefit level than that available to those over 25.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie). The new clause is limited because it does not go as far as I would like. There should be equality of payment for all people adjudged to be living independently, whether they be over 25 or under.

I conclude by considering the question of income support for young people aged 19 who are trying to complete secondary education, but are estranged from their parents and receive no income support and are therefore unable to continue their education.

I have received a letter from the Minister about a constituent of mine whose name I will not refer to because that would be unfair to her. The Minister wrote:

"Thank you for your letter about . . . a nineteen year old student estranged from her parents and is no longer entitled to Income Support.

I sympathise with her position but I am afraid that extra-statutory payments can be made only where claimants are deprived of all or part of their entitlement in a way not foreseen or intended when the law was drawn up. This is not the case here, so a payment would not be in order."

Of course it could not have been foreseen when the law was drawn up that this particular young person would reach such a pass in her relationship with her parents that they would throw her out. However, it falls on the social security system to support her now that she has been thrown out to allow her to complete her education and develop her abilities to the full. The same does not apply to the children of very wealthy parents who do not get thrown out. They do not get into those disputes or have those problems. They have a family safety-net. There is no such safety-net for people like my constituent.

I hope that for once the House will recognise that many of the social problems facing young people today have been created by the social security legislation which deliberately ignores them. I hope that hon. Members will at least support the new clause as going some way towards alleviating the misery of those young people as it gives them the support, resources and recognition by society that they crave and which we should give them.

10.45 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Until I heard the intervention of the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) I had not intended to contribute to this debate. The hon. Gentleman's inspired prejudice will have touched many hon. Members very deeply—in such a way, indeed, that they may have second thoughts about their intentions in relation to the new clause.

The acid test of the maturity of any society in the world is the way in which it looks after those who are most vulnerable—by definition, surely, the aged and those who are not fully come of age. Since time began, there has never been a decade—indeed, there has never been a century—when young people did not find themselves in the type of situation that hon. Members have cited tonight. I will not tabulate cases; suffice it is say that we can all cast our minds back to the story of the prodigal son, from which there is a lesson to be learnt. The choice facing that father was whether to allow his son to continue on the prodigal road or to bring him back into society by adopting a humanitarian attitude such as we are not seeing here tonight.

It is a characteristic not of this generation or of this decade, but of the human condition, that young people will always find themselves in a position of vulnerability, wanting to assert their independence. There are three groups of such young people. First, there are those who have to leave home because of various circumstances there, some of which have been mentioned by hon. Members—child abuse, alienation from parents, or whatever. In any case, it is imperative that they leave home because they have no control over the circumstances. Very often young people, in order to protect what society cannot protect for them, find themselves with no alternative to taking steps that will make them homeless. Society owes a debt to those young people. They are entitled to the protection of society because they are at

risk, and if society does not give them that protection it is demonstrating the callousness that this legislation represents.

The second vulnerable group of young people are those who wish to assert their independence. I am sure that there is not in this House a parent who has not seen a child take the tent into the garden to show that he can stand on his own feet. Such people will come back into society if society helps them back. But they are at a crossroads; they can either turn towards the type of life that hon. Members have illustrated, or return to society, more mature from the experience of having lived away from home.

The third vulnerable group must surely be those who are physically, emotionally or psychologically scarred by experiences at school, within the family, or otherwise in their own environment. We cannot allow those people to go unaided. Staying in their situation of vulnerability can only lead to further problems.

I realise that in the cause of people like the hon. Member for Stockport I will not be able to appeal to humanitarian considerations, so perhaps I should appeal to the calculating machines that sometimes masquerade as their minds. What is the net cost of this attitude? What is the cost of recycling the problems from one decade to the next? What is the cost in terms of keeping people in prison and other institutions, of keeping people on the verge between being law-abiding citizens and being law breakers? The net cost of such an approach is quantifiable and is something that the hon. Member for Stockport might understand.

The recycling effect is very serious indeed—not just for the young people, not just for others affected by their lives, not just for the parents, not just for the immediate environment, but for the whole of society, which adopts the faulty premise that if people are left on the dunghill the height of the dunghill will somehow be lessened.

A serious principle is at stake. It is based on the choice of the type of society that we want to create and sustain. Is it a society which will honour its commitments and responsibility to the most vulnerable or one that will work on a false premise? There is a false premise in the legislation. It is the notion that leaving people to stand on their own two feet, cold baths, bodily exercise and a little starvation will put the matter right. It does not. We have centuries of experience to show that it does not. It simply exacerbates the problem and recycles the difficulties that our young people are facing now.

Those young people in every city and in rural areas could well be guided into productive lives if a humanitarian approach were adopted by the caring services and in this legislation. If we have this cold, callous heartlessness in our legislation, it must reflect a cold, callous heartlessness in our legislators. We are the legislators. Is that the type of condition that we want to recycle for further generations?

Mr. Favell: I shall be brief, but I must reply to that attack.

I have nothing against young people standing on their own two feet. My objection is to encouraging young people to stand on the state's two feet. That is precisely what the Opposition have been trying to encourage for years. For a long time the Labour party encouraged young people to think that they could leave school at 16, go immediately into accommodation provided by the state and live on the state, rather than look for a job or even train for one. That was not in the long-term interests of young people.

I remember early after my election a lady coming to my surgery and saying, "Mr. Favell, I have a daughter of 16. She is being encouraged into idleness and immorality by the state. She has left a perfectly good home and set up home with a young man who is also 16. She is living in luxury and has no intention of getting a job. What is the state doing?" I have heard that story over and over again. I am glad that the Government have grasped the nettle and are insisting that young people find a job, if possible, and are not encouraged to think that they can live on the state for ever and a day.

In many areas young women have illegitimate children and those children are condemned to the same cycle of deprivation as their mothers. That should be discouraged. My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security is doing exactly the right thing in discouraging such behaviour.

[Mr. Favell]

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I must take issue with the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). He cited the parable of the prodigal son, but he seemed to get it on its head. The prodigal son left with plenty of capital, blew the lot and went back to the bosom of his family where he was welcomed back. He certainly did not have the opportunity to live on state benefits when he was away from home.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that we seek to ensure that, whatever changes we make in the provision for young people, the most vulnerable are given special protection. I hope that I can persuade the House that that is exactly what the Government are doing. I am absolutely certain —I echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell)—that the state should not be seen to encourage or give a perverse incentive to young people to leave home.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Disgraceful.

Mr. Scott: Perhaps the hon. Lady would allow me to develop the argument before she decides whether what I shall say is disgraceful. I represent part of London which under Conservative and Labour Governments has seen the problems of young people. They come to London and chance their luck, and I have seen the dangers and difficulties with which they can be confronted.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does the Minister ever ask why those children come to London? It was clear from a survey that I carried out on homosexuality and on the use of small boys for male prostitution that many of those children were driven out of existing homes by the conditions and the abuses that they there suffered. Will the Minister not use as an excuse the suggestion that all those who come to London are driven here by some extraordinary greed for the future? Will he not accept that many of them are driven out by things that none of us would accept for our children or for anyone else's?

Mr. Scott: I am sorry that I gave way to the hon. Lady. I hope that I shall be able to persuade the House that we have taken special account of young people who find themselves in the situation that the hon. Lady has described.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) did not speak to the new clause, but launched into a violent attack on the broad thrust of the Government's policy for 16 and 17-year-olds. I do not blame him for doing that, but I am confident that the broad thrust of the Government's policy is right. Many of his arguments during his passionate address to the House were based on emotion and prejudice rather than on the facts of the case. He talked about the lack of places on YTS. At the end of February there were virtually 144,000 unfilled places on YTS throughout the country, and an excess of places over demand in every region.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister accept that in February, in the Training Agency area which I represent, there were three times as many people seeking YTS places as there were places?

Mr. Scott: There was an excess of places in the region as a whole. If the hon. Gentleman would like to write to me with the figures, he will receive a considered response.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North spoke as though young people, when they asked for consideration under the severe hardship provisions, were inevitably turned down. From 12 September 1988—when the new system came into existence—up to 21 April, there were 7,464 decisions on severe hardship, and 4,839 of those were favourable, which is some 65 per cent. Those decisions are, therefore, taken on a fair and rational basis.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman had his say. He gave the impresson that young people who came forward and pleaded severe hardship inevitably had their cases rejected out of hand. That is not true. Some two thirds of those who came forward were given a favourable decision.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister has confirmed my point with his figures, because 7,000 odd is a small number of young people to have claimed on grounds of severe hardship. Will the Minister join me in encouraging every 16 and 17-year-old who has had benefit taken away from him and who has been left with no means of income to appeal on grounds of severe hardship? If a person has no income, potentially he or she has severe hardship. In particular, will the Minister give a directive to every DSS office that in no circumstances must it tell or lead those youngsters to believe that they are disqualified from income support merely on the ground that they are 16 or 17-years-old?

Mr. Scott: Every 16 or 17-year-old is guaranteed the offer of a place on the youth training scheme. It is possible that some people, who have to live independently, may need to be considered under the severe hardship provisions. In those circumstances, I believe that it is right that we should look with compassion and sympathy at the circumstances that confront them. Two thirds of those who have come forward and who have asked for consideration have had a favourable response.

I am grateful for the Opposition's guarded welcome for the concessions for treating 16 and 17-year-olds that I was recently able to announce. The effect of the new clause is to give 16 and 17-year-olds who have no parents or who for a prescribed list of reasons are unable to live at home the over-25s rate of income support. The difference between us is not the treatment that should be accorded to those people, but the level of benefit to which they should be entitled. I believe that our list accords closely to the list that the hon. Member for Newport, West has in mind. Should such youngsters get the 18 to 24-year-olds rate of benefit or should they get the rate for those aged 25 and older? I shall advance a number of reasons why we should stay where we are in this regard.

First, we have only recently introduced the concessions that I was able to announce—*[Interruption.]* When we introduced the reforms in April 1988 I undertook that we would carefully monitor their effect. One result of the monitoring has been the concessions that I have announced. We should wait to see how those concessions work out. I believe that the 18 to 24-year rate is appropriate for the youngsters in question.

Under-25s on income support get the personal allowance, £27·40. They also get housing benefit, 100 per cent. of their rent and 80 per cent. of their rates. I accept

that, having paid their housing costs, they are left with an amount that is not generous. I believe that it is adequate and I do not want to reach the situation where we restore the perverse incentive that existed before April 1988 for young people to leave home and seek to live independently when the vast majority of them should be given every encouragement to remain with their families.

Mr. Bill Michie: What is the difference between someone under-25 and someone over-25? The Government recognise that, at the age of 18, when called upon, one can don a uniform and die for one's country. For some strange reason, however, the Government do not recognise that person as an adult with the same problems as those over-25.

Mr. Scott: I believe that people aged 16 and 17 are more vulnerable and, as far as we can encourage them to do anything, they should be encouraged to stay within the bosom of their family.

Mr. Battle: Some cannot stay.

Mr. Scott: If they cannot, the hon. Gentleman knows full well that special arrangements are made for them.

There is a difference between the under-25s and the over-25s not least in their earning capacity. Young people under-25 earn a great deal less than those over-25 and most live in other people's households rather than independently. I do not want to return to the situation where we must reintroduce the complexities and difficulties of the householder test that existed before April 1988.

I accept that the arrangements that are made are not generous, but I believe that they are sufficient. We shall extend the provisions that are made during the child benefit extension period to include those who are genuinely estranged from their families. At the end of that period it will be possible, virtually automatic, for such cases to be considered under the severe hardship provisions should a youngster say that he still needs that help. It is right that that should happen.

We shall, of course, continue to monitor the impact of our changes. Such monitoring is not a one-off exercise but a continuing process. I pay warm tribute to the voluntary organisations which have helped to monitor the changes and which have given considered judgments about the cases they have identified. In part they led us to make the changes that we have announced.

The hon. Member for Newport, West raised the cases of Wilfred and Tracy, which were highlighted by the National Childrens Bureau. The House knows that I never comment in detail on the Floor of the House on individual cases that are brought forward because the facts underlying those cases may well turn out to be inaccurate. At first glance, the examples quoted by the National Childrens Bureau seem to have some inexplicable defects, but I should like to consider them rather more carefully and study the figures. I shall then respond to the National Childrens Bureau and, if necessary, will place the letter in the Library.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) spoke to amendment No. 106. I shall read his speech, as he did, and I shall study the details that he went over rather quickly. Whereas the new clause seeks to overturn something that has existed for just over a month, he is seeking to overturn an arrangement that has existed for three weeks. We abolished the special rates which were a carryover from the old board and lodging supplementary benefits scheme.

I believe that the old board and lodging system really provided an incentive for claimants and landlords to behave in a quite perverse manner. We know that some landlords who provided accommodation of this type used to hang signs in their windows saying "DHSS claimants only", because they could get from claimants on the board and lodging allowance rents they could not get from people in work, and they were prepared to specialise in this type of operation. Knowing that the claimants could get a benefit, landlords could make higher charges, often providing no extra services whatever and meals which were mere tokens. Claimants knew that they could get the personal allowance as well as the eating out allowance. The result was an explosion of this sort of provision, a trebling in only two years. It was therefore right to seek to change such a provision.

In essence, in the changes to the hostels and board and lodging areas we are attempting to provide that the social security system is neutral when it relates to the type of accommodation provided. Therefore, all claimants should have their housing cost met through the housing benefits system, and other needs met through income support. The amendment that the hon. Gentleman will be able to move on another day would negate the effect desired.

I also find it very difficult to support a system that encourages local authorities to provide bed-and-breakfast accommodation for homeless families. I do not believe that it is in the interests of the homeless families or of the local authorities concerned. Many boroughs are able to get by without using that sort of provision. By using short lease or short life property, they avoid resorting to bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That is the right way to go.

Of course, as we make the changes to board and lodging provisions, we are providing transitional protection for varying periods to the most vulnerable groups. I cannot ask the House to accept the amendment or the new clause.

Mr. Flynn: The Minister refers to perverse incentives for people to leave home. I recall the words of the Prime Minister who, after promising that all young people would have a YTS place to go to, when questioned about the many thousands of young people from many parts of the country who found they still had no YTS place after the bridging period, replied that places were available if they were prepared to leave home. Is that not a perverse incentive for people to leave home? The Minister should look at the Government's own regulations relating to non-dependent relatives. In such cases, a large deduction is made from the family housing benefit—another perverse incentive for people to leave home.

When referring in my opening remarks to the malice and ignorance of some Conservative Members, I thought that I might have overstated the case, but then I heard from the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) the genuine voice of malice and ignorance that inspires the Government. The tabloid understanding of reality of Conservative Members has driven them to this extreme of using the device of poverty to force confused, unhappy, damaged young people to do the Government's bidding.

The Minister appears not to understand this clause. Many Labour Members have said that it does not go far

[Mr. Flynn]

enough. There is a case for saying that there should not be a cut-off at the age of 25. There are no signs displayed in boarding houses stating that two rates apply to a flat—one for people older than 25, and one for younger people. In the supermarkets, there are not two prices for the groceries—one for the under-25s and one for the over-25s. The Government's policy is based on that irrationality.

We were practical and modest in framing the new clause. The people covered by it are those who will not be affected by any perverse desire to leave home and rush to the bright lights of Chelsea. They are specifically enumerated as those who have no homes to return to. They are married couples, people who have left home because of parental abuse, those who have never had a home, or have been in care for virtually all their lives, and those who are living away from the parental home for other reasons, perhaps because their parents cannot afford to support them as they are chronically sick or disabled.

There is no reason for the Minister to reject the new clause. Out duty is to cherish these young people, not to punish them. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 168, Noes 296.

Division No. 173] **[11.10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*

Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 4

LIABILITY OF PARENTS TO MAINTAIN CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF NINETEEN IN RESPECT OF WHOM INCOME SUPPORT IS PAID

Mr. Scott: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 3, line 22, leave out subsection (3).

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 23.

Mr. Scott: The amendments are purely technical. They amend clause 4 to take account of the recent commencement order which brought into effect from 1 April 1989 sections of the Family Law Reform Act 1987 which amend section 26(4) of the Social Security Act.

As originally drafted, clause 4 provides for amendments of section 26(4) before and after its amendment by the Family Law Reform Act. This is no longer necessary and the clause is therefore simplified by the two amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 23, in page 3, line 30, leave out 'as substituted by' and insert

"reference to a person's children to be construed in accordance with".—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Resolved,

That the draft Food (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 16th January, be approved. —*[Mr. Ian Stewart.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Queen's Recommendation having been signified——

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.), and the order [7 April].

DATA PROTECTION

That there be paid to or in respect of the Data Protection Registrar such pension as is provided for in the Pension Arrangement attached to the Home Office letter of 1st March 1989 to Mr. Howe, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th March.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

Question agreed to.

Tenant Farmers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

11.24 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate an Adjournment debate that concerns tenant farmers. From inquiries that I have made and briefings that I have received, I know that the concerns of tenant farmers are shared by the National Farmers Union, the Tenant Farmers Association and the Country Landowners Association. These organisations have come together, especially over recent months. It is a sign of the concerns of all the organisations that represent tenant farmers that they are co-operating with one another on such a vital matter. For example, the Country Landowners Association is surveying some landowners to try to ascertain what, if anything, would bring new tenancies on to the market.

The tenanted sector represents 35 to 40 per cent. of all activity in agriculture. It is estimated that it represents one half of dairy production. It is, therefore, a significant part of the agriculture scene. That being so, it is important that, as far as possible, we as a nation ensure a fair working environment for the tenant farmer.

Additionally, the tenanted sector has offered a means of entry into the industry for those without considerable means. The landlord tends to be a business investor, and often a long-term one. We need both the tenant farmer and the landlord, yet the tenant has constraints on his activities which the freeholder does not face. The tenant has to work within the legal structure of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. His balance sheet cannot show a capital asset in the same way as a freeholder's. His income is greatly reduced by the rent that he has to pay.

If things go really bad, the freeholder can sell up and pay his liabilities. The tenant cannot do that. He has no collateral apart from his machinery, which is often not very much and which is usually depreciating. In addition, he has his livestock. The tenant cannot sell and restructure his operation.

If the tenant is not too highly geared, he may be in a better position than the owner-occupier, who may have recently taken on his farm with very high capital and interest repayment obligations. I would suggest to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary that not many tenant farmers are in that happy position. Most of them are highly geared, and their lack of collateral causes bank managers to monitor them carefully and constantly with a view to pulling in their loans. Therefore, in matters of finance the tenant has much less flexibility than the freeholder.

The Tenant Farmers Association has produced figures to suggest that the 1988 statistics show that the value of the tenant sector per acre has fallen from £590 in 1978-79 to £322 in 1987-88. They show, for example, that the farmer who is growing winter wheat that is sold for feed has a surplus of only £40 per acre. From that, he pays his rent, his tax and his personal drawings. With so may arable farmers paying more than £40 per acre in rent, the tenant farmers' base is weakening. His reliance on short-term bank borrowing, with an increase in financial charges, is increasing.

The Agricultural Holdings Act provides a framework that imposes obligations on tenant farmers' husbandry. If

a tenant looks after his farm he can generally be assured of lifetime security and even more than that if his tenancy was created before 1984, as close members of his family can succeed to the tenancy.

Tenant farmers believe that the present framework of law has served them well in the past, during a period of expanding production. However, in times of restraint and diversification, they face additional problems. Most tenancy agreements allow the landlord power to serve notice to quit on two or three months' notice if the landlord gets planning permission. In addition, a county council farm tenant may be prevented from taking on more land or from having another source of income.

Government schemes such as set-aside and the concept of environmentally sensitive areas were introduced to reduce overall agricultural output and attain certain environmental objectives, but in practice they are not available to all classes of farmers. Many diversification schemes involve proposals that fall outside the legal definition of agriculture, which means that they are subject to landlords' consent. There are many supportive landlords, but in some cases landlords have refused consent to otherwise reasonable propositions that would not have affected their long-term interests. The tenant has no power to challenge such a refusal. Some tenants feel too vulnerable even to consider such a scheme, and some landlords' agents have been known to send threatening letters when a tenant has gone only as far as registering his eligibility for set-aside.

I appreciate that a wise tenant will want to consult his landlord at an early stage and should first obtain a business study, for which a grant can be obtained under the farm diversification grant scheme. It is sensible and natural that a landlord should want to see a viable proposition that has been well thought out.

The Tenant Farmers Association has suggested that a tenant should have a right of appeal to the agricultural lands tribunal if the landlord does not agree to his diversification plans. As a lawyer, I appreciate that the difficulty is that the tribunal has no power to amend a tenancy agreement. If the tenancy agreement specifically prohibits non-agricultural activity, it would require quite fundamental change to the Agricultural Holdings Act if this route were to be followed, and it would be highly contentious.

In some ways, diversification can be a disaster for the tenant, for when planning permission is needed for a non-agricultural use the grant of such permission is a ground for an incontestable notice to quit. Most incontestable grounds in a notice to quit rely on something that the tenant has done wrongly or badly, but that is not so when planning permission has been granted, even if it were granted on an application by the tenant. Usually, planning permission and the notice to quit relate to the whole farm, and the notice must be between one and two years. I learn that many tenants are being offered agreements that allow landlords to serve a notice to quit on part of the farm only, which allows much shorter notice —usually two or three months only. This is another aspect of the vulnerability of the tenant that I draw to the House's attention. As the farmhouse is often the attraction for development, the tenant may be left with the prospect of losing some or all of his farm buildings, including his farmhouse.

That brings me to the problem that a tenant faces with compensation. When he loses his holding, the tenant is entitled to the equivalent of five or six times the rent of the lost area, but where that area includes a farm or buildings, it is not adequate compensation for the destruction of one's life's work.

The Tenant Farmers Association is calling for compensation for loss of potential profits and the cost of replacement of fixed equipment, among other things, to be awarded to the tenant, by arbitration if necessary. The claim seems to be fair and equitable, and I suggest it to my hon. Friend the Minister. Even though it is an abuse of the notice to quit powers under the 1986 Act, there is nothing to stop a landlord obtaining planning permission without ever intending to implement it or actually implementing it, just to gain possession of the property. I suggest that if planning permission is to be used just as a device to end a tenancy, surely the tenant should in turn be awarded proper compensation for his loss.

Had my time to speak not been limited, I would have addressed the House at greater length on the problems arising out of the dairy quotas. I should like to stress to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary the difficulties with regard to arbitration. Usually new rents are negotiated between landlord and tenant, both sides using agents, and if an agreement cannot be reached, the 1986 Act lays down factors that an arbitrator should take into account.

The hazards of arbitration are now only too apparent. In a recent case in Lancashire five tenant farmers had to carry the landlord's entire cost of arbitration of £75,000 on some 700 acres. It was an astonishing award by any standards. The fact that it happened means that arbitration is not now to be considered lightly, even by some larger farmers. Many agents are reporting that tenants are instructing them to act in negotiations, but not to go to arbitration, with the result that higher rents than can be justified economically are often agreed to avoid this. At a time in the economy of agriculture when it would be an effective argument for a tenant to press for a reduction in the new rent claimed, arbitration is of itself generating unjustified rent increases.

The remedy is clear; each side should bear his own costs of an arbitration, unless an arbitrator makes a specific finding that one side or the other was unreasonably pursuing his case to arbitration. Arbitration should be simple and cheap and should be an acceptable outcome and procedure. Without that reform, it is rapidly ceasing to be any of those things. I believe that the problem is even worse in some cases for the county council tenant, where the approach is often confrontational rather than conciliatory, with arbitration almost the inevitable outcome. Once again, the smaller farmer is the one to suffer.

The tenant farmer has historically been of the greatest importance to agriculture. When farming faces declining incomes, the tenanted sector faces particular disadvantages and difficulties, especially as agriculture moves from a period of growth to one of restraint and diversification. I hope that in his reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will recognise the importance of the sector and its difficulties, that he will reaffirm his belief in a healthy tenanted sector and that he will pledge the Government to take action from time to time when difficulties such as those I have outlined are brought to his notice. Only in that way will the tenanted sector continue to be a healthy one in the agricultural scene.

11.38 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Richard Ryder): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander), who is a distinguished member of the Select Committee on Agriculture, on his success in the ballot. I do, of course, appreciate the concern about the future of the agricultural landlord-tenant system. It is an important issue and I am grateful to him for raising it.

As I see it, there are two interrelated issues which need to be considered. First, there is the continuing decline in the tenanted sector which affects potential new tenants and established tenants who, for one reason or another, need additional land. Secondly, there are the difficulties that some existing farmers face.

As my hon. Friend knows, at the end of the last century about 90 per cent. of the agricultural land was tenanted, but, according to the 1987 June census, the figure is now about 37 per cent. There have been a number of contributory factors, but an increase in the size of the owner-occupied sector was probably inevitable. It echoes the pattern in the residential sector. However, it is clear that some landowners who do not want to farm the land themselves have been disinclined to let and have opted for other forms of contractual arrangements to maintain value and income. If the tenanted sector is to be revitalised, we must find ways of making the letting of land more attractive to landowners. I shall return to this issue a little later. First, I shall refer to those farmers who already rent a holding.

In recent years, the movement in average farm incomes showed a similar pattern for all types of tenure with declines in 1985-86 followed by a recovery in 1986-87. However, in 1987-88, the latest year for which data are available, wholly tenanted farms in the farm business survey in England recorded a small increase—nearly 5 per cent.—in average income, while their owner-occupied and mixed tenure counterparts showed falls. Incomes on particular types of farm—for example, dairying—moved in the same direction for tenanted as for other farms. Figures are not yet available for 1988-89, the year in which the sharp fall in farm incomes has been the subject of concern in the farming community.

Assets tend to be lower on tenanted than on owner-occupied farms, but borrowings are also lower. On average, the borrowings of tenanted farms in 1987-88 were only about two thirds of those of owner-occupied farms and less than half those of mixed tenure farms. In addition, about 40 per cent. of tenanted farms in the survey recorded no bank borrowing at all at the close of 1987-88. For the small business size group, about half recorded no bank borrowings.

As I have said, our 1987-88 survey showed that tenanted farms in England recorded an increase in average income of nearly 5 per cent. The annual rent inquiry for 1988 showed that in all English farms in the inquiry due a rent review between 1987 and 1988 there was an average increase in rent of 3·5 per cent. On about half the farms due a rent review there was no change in the rent. In Wales on farms due a rent review there was an average increase of 7·75 per cent. On about one quarter of the farms due a rent review there was no change.

There is, therefore, no evidence to suggest that rents are not coming down as quickly as profits. On the contrary, it appears that the new rent formula introduced in 1984 is working satisfactorily.

My hon. Friend has drawn attention to some recent arbitrations in which tenants have been faced with high costs. Under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986, the arbitrator determines who should pay the costs. He must take into consideration, first, the reasonableness or otherwise of the claim of either party; secondly, any unreasonable demand for particulars or refusal to supply particulars; and, thirdly, generally all the circumstances of the case.

The usual advice to arbitrators in legal text books, as my hon. Friend, as a lawyer, will know, is that they should follow the general working principle adopted by the courts that costs should follow the award unless the particular circumstances dictate otherwise. Therefore, each party must remember that the award may go against him, in which case he is likely to have to pay the costs. He should consider carefully with his professional adviser whether it is sensible to go to arbitration or whether it would be more prudent to reach an agreement.

Arbitration costs can, of course, be reduced if parties reach agreement on as many issues as possible before the hearing. If complex legal issues are raised or parties produce a mass of evidence, an arbitration can prove expensive.

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors has published a booklet entitled "Minimising the Costs of Agricultural Arbitration". It is a step-by-step guide through the arbitration process, showing the correct procedures and how to avoid protracted proceedings and expensive consequences. We hope that parties to an arbitration will find it a useful guide.

I note my hon. Friend's suggestion that each party should bear his own costs, unless the arbitrator considers one side to have acted unreasonably, in which case he could be required to pay the other party's costs. The Tenant Farmers Association may wish to discuss that proposal with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and other organisations representing landlords and tenants. If it is felt that this approach is practical and it attracts a reasonable degree of support from the industry, we would be prepared to consider proposals for changing the legislation when an opportunity arises. We would, however, need to be satisfied that there is a genuine need for change which could not be met in some other way.

It is suggested that tenants may be unable to diversify into non-agricultural activities or to take up the opportunity of alternative land uses, but I am pleased to say that there are signs that landlords are allowing their tenants to do so. A tenant who wants to establish an enterprise must consider the terms of his tenancy agreement, and he may need to negotiate a variation with his landlord. For that reason, he will be wise to discuss his ideas with the landlord. A business study, for which a grant can be obtained under a farm diversification grant scheme, may prove invaluable in this context, as I would expect a landlord to be reluctant to give approval to a scheme of doubtful viability or which is ill conceived.

I understand that some tenancy agreements—particularly those of local authority tenants—prohibit the tenant from earning income from non-agricultural

sources. However, I believe that some local authorities are now being more flexible in their approach to diversification, and I find that encouraging.

More generally, I make it clear that, when we are devising new schemes, we take considerable trouble to ensure that tenants and owner-occupiers alike can participate. I am pleased to say that this is bearing fruit. For example, in the set-aside scheme nearly one third of all applications came from tenants.

My hon. Friend intimated that a tenant should be able to apply to the agricultural lands tribunal if his landlord will not agree to his diversification plans. However, in many cases an amendment to the tenancy agreement is required, and, at present, ALTs do not have the power to do that. Without fairly fundamental changes to the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986, it is doubtful whether a tribunal could give a tenant permission to engage in a non-agricultural activity if a clause in the tenancy agreement specifically prohibits the use of the land for non-agricultural purposes.

The agricultural holdings legislation aims to strike a fair balance between the often conflicting interests of landlords and tenants. The satisfactory tenant farmer is given security of tenure, but the legislation recognises that there are circumstances in which the landlord should be able to regain possession. They include the situation in which he has obtained planning permission to use the tenanted land for a non-agricultural purpose. It should be remembered that the landlord is the owner of the capital asset and should, in common with other owners of property, be entitled to any increase in value that may accrue from possible development. He has elected to enter the land market with all the risks that that involves, which, in some cases, can mean a low return and falling land values, where there is no development potential, or the land is of poor quality.

My hon. Friend said that some landlords are using the incontestable notice to quit provisions as a means of regaining vacant possession of the holdings and are not proceeding with the development for which they had obtained planning permission. I have not received any representations on this issue, and if my hon. Friend wishes me to examine this issue I would need to have further information on the scale of the problem.

The appropriate level of compensation to be paid to a tenant when his land is taken for development is clearly a contentious issue. No formula will satisfy everyone, but the current provisions in the legislation entitle the tenant to compensation for disturbance equal to up to six years' rent, plus compensation for improvements and tenant right matters. The level of compensation for disturbance was last increased in 1968 at a time when loss of land to development was increasing. The rate of land lost to development—and this is not generally known—is now only about one third of what it was in the 1960s. A major difficulty noted in 1968, which is as valid today, is the shortage of land to rent. This often makes it difficult for tenant farmers who lose land to development to find other land to rent. Increasing the level of compensation paid to tenants for disturbance could be a further disincentive to landlords to let land.

That brings me back to a point that I made at the outset of my speech concerning the decline in the amount of tenanted land. Various interests in the industry are rightly considering ways of revitalising the tenanted sector. These include provision of fixed-term tenancies, retirement tenancies and complete freedom of contract. I welcome these initiatives and look forward to hearing the views of the Tenant Farmers Association on the way forward when I meet its representatives in the middle of May.

My right hon. Friend the Minister and I have made it clear that if the Government were presented with practical ways of making tenancies easier to create, we would be prepared to consider them. However, if we are to contemplate legislation—and I should stress that there are always difficulties in securing a slot in the legislative programme—there must be not only some signs of agreement in the industry but, even more important, a clear prospect of the legislation being of worthwhile practical effect.

Finally, my hon. Friend mentioned the attachment of milk quotas to land. The Government's position is clear. It would be in the industry's interest for the link between quotas and land to be broken. That would make it easier for normal structural development to take place. That requires changes in Community rules, so immediate action is in any event unlikely. The Government would certainly wish to protect the legitimate interest of landlords and tenants alike.

I thank my hon. Friend for initiating the debate and for setting out his case so clearly and cogently. If, for reasons of time, I have not been able to deal with each of his points, he can be sure that I will write to him later. This is an issue of great importance, as he stressed, and my hon. Friend has done a great service to the House and to tenant farmers by raising the subject so well.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HYTHE MARINA VILLAGE (SOUTHAMPTON) WAVESCREEN BILL

PENZANCE ALBERT PIER EXTENSION BILL

WESLEYAN ASSURANCE SOCIETY BILL
As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *[LORDS]*

KINGSTON UPON HULL CITY COUNCIL BILL *[LORDS]*
Orders for Second Reading read.
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

GPs (Contracts)

11. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what subjects have been raised with him by doctors making representations on the proposals for their new contracts.

7. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current situation in the negotiations on general practitioners' contracts.

12. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in negotiations on general practitioners' contracts.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Discussions on the new contract have now lasted for more than 12 months. I last met the General Medical Services Committee negotiators on 20 March. In the light of the discussions my officials are now preparing amendments to the relevant NHS regulations and to the statement of fees and allowances, on which they will be consulting the General Medical Services Committee negotiators. A conference of local medical committees is being held this week and the negotiators will no doubt consider whether to seek any further meetings with me in the light of the outcome of that conference.

Mr. Jack: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that in his future negotiations and deliberations on this subject he will take fully into account the representations made by many Conservative Members following meetings with their doctors, who have expressed concern about the contract? Will he also take this opportunity to put at rest the minds of the many patients who have written to me and my hon. Friends about the effects of the contract and assure them that the principles of the National Health Service will be maintained as a service free at the point of consumption with medicine supplied without let or hindrance because of budgets?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Members who have informed me of the views of the practitioners in their constituencies. We have taken on board many of the present representations which have already been made in the course of the discussions and we will certainly take on board all constructive representations now. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is most unfortunate that, in the course of negotiating the contract, some doctors have gone out of their way to cause needless alarm to patients, because no threats to patients will arise from this.

Mr. Coombs: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there are 5,000 more doctors than in 1979, they are far better paid than ever before and the number of ancillary workers working for them has doubled, and therefore the disgraceful statements made in a pamphlet by the British Medical Association are often untruthful, alarmist and verging on the paranoid? Will he confirm once again that, under the proposed Health Service reforms, no patient will go without a comprehensive local health service, adequate drugs or appropriate treatment?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. We now have more doctors than before. They are better paid and their average list sizes have gone down. That is why it is right to concentrate on a contract which rewards fairly those who carry the largest work loads and one which also encourages new services for patients, which we offer in the contract. In contrast, the leaflet produced by the BMA to which my hon. Friend referred, contains scurrilous nonsense. It is a long time since I have encountered a trade union which is prepared to spend millions of pounds of its members' money on spreading untruths among its consumers in that way.

Mr. Hunter: In the light of a general practitioner telling an elderly constituent of mine that, under the new contract, he may not be able to treat her, will my right hon. and learned Friend emphasise the fact that the elderly will be well looked after under the provisions of the new contract?

Mr. Clarke: Yes. If such an allegation has been made —and of course, I accept what my hon. Friend has said —it is totally untrue. The contract is so designed to give extra payments to those doctors who take on elderly patients. The contents of the new contract that we are discussing include new services which are expressly aimed at elderly people to ensure that they—particularly those over the age of 75—have more regular contact with their GPs. The contract is designed to improve services to the elderly. It is scandalous nonsense to claim that any elderly patient is threatened by it.

Mr. Fearn: What representation has the Secretary of State received from women doctors? Does he not agree that the new contract could harm women doctors' practices, which tend to be smaller?

Mr. Clarke: The contract proposals recognise explicitly the prospect for job-sharing. We also acknowledge the right for someone to have the full status of a principal when taking on part-time obligations. The contract is designed to encourage women doctors in general practice. An ever higher proportion of GPs will be women. The difficulties arise from the changes in basic practice allowance, not from the contract. They stem from the fear of some women that partners will not take on female partners unless the BPA is so constructed as to give all partners a financial benefit when a part-time partner is taken on. Women have no reason to be fearful of their colleagues' prejudice. Nothing in the contract would encourage that.

Mr. Dalyell: Are GPs to be cash-limited?

Mr. Clarke: No they are not.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Secretary of State accept that the only reassurance that he could give to National Health Service users would be to cease the stupidity of trying to transform doctors into accountants? The public's clear answer is that they want no part of this crazy scheme.

Mr. Clarke: Doctors are independent contractors. It is my duty, on behalf of the patient, to negotiate a contract which rewards heavy work load and encourages good performance. The rest of the population are paid according to the work that they do and the standards that they attain. Many doctors can see no reason in principle why the same criteria should not apply to general practice. The result of the new contract will be an improved service for the patients, because the best and most go-ahead practices will be rewarded. We shall also introduce into the contract up-to-date services in disease prevention, health promotion, and closer surveillance of young children and elderly people.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept my thanks for putting at rest the fears of my 84-year-old constituent, who had been informed by his doctor that if this contract went through his doctor would no longer be able to visit him at home in a rural area?

Mr. Clarke: The new contract will place the doctor under an express duty to keep in touch with the elderly patient and keep himself well informed of his home circumstances. By its capitation payments, the new contract will pay the doctor extra to enable him to carry out that new duty. I can only assume that if the doctor in question has put out such information, he has been totally misled by the information from Tavistock square.

Ms. Harman: Is it not the case that a patient receives better care if a GP has more time to spend with each patient? Is it not going in completely the wrong direction to give financial incentives to doctors to have as many patients as possible on their lists?

Mr. Clarke: I quite agree that patients will wish to join practices that give them adequate time and care and, I hope, offer the new services, for which the new contract is an encouragement. With respect, the arguments about list sizes constitute a complete red herring, which has been put in the forefront of many of the discussions. Under this contract, there is no reason why anyone with an average size list should wish to acquire new patients. A doctor seeking to enhance his income would go for the new services and seek to hit the new performance targets. The hon. Lady and hon. Members on both sides of the House should not be misled by the simplistic argument that this is all about increasing list sizes. The new contract is aimed at raising the standards of general practice to the general public, and the best GPs will respond to that.

"Working for Patients"

2. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from members of the public about his White Paper "Working for Patients."

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received well over 2,000 representations from members of the public, expressing a wide range of views. I shall take these into account as part of the process of implementing the proposals.

Mr. Pawsey: Can my right hon. and learned Friend estimate how many of those representations are based on complete inaccuracies? Will he join me in deploring the black propaganda circulating among so many of our constituents, and causing such fear and distress to the elderly? What further action can he take to reassure the British people that the White Paper will improve the Health service?

Mr. Clarke: I regret to say that a proportion of the representations that I have received are indeed based on inaccuracies. They come from two main sources. One is the campaigning literature about the contract, which suggests that somehow the elderly will be turned away and that other damage will follow; the other is the Labour party, which is carrying on a private and eccentric campaign of its own, claiming that it is rescuing the Health Service from privatisation. I have never proposed its privatisation, and nor has any other member of the Government.

Mr. Wigley: Surely the Secretary of State accepts that all the GPs who are responding negatively to his proposals —as the overwhelming majority are—are neither paranoid, to quote the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), nor scurrilous, to quote the Secretary of State. They are genuinely concerned about the future of a service to which they have given their lives, and it is time for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to respond more sensitively to their representations.

Mr. Clarke: Very few GPs, I think, would challenge my aims of improving general practice. Very few do not accept, for instance, that we should seek to attain World Health Organisation standards of vaccination for children and should not get cervical screening to a level of 80 per cent., which will help to tackle the biggest single avoidable cause of death among women in this country.

I think that those aims have the support of the great body of responsible GPs, and it is a pity that their representatives believed recently that they were supporting their interests by putting around scurrilous leaflets. I hope that those representatives will now come back to discuss the serious aims of general practice with me and with my colleagues.

Dame Jill Knight: Are not so many GPs behaving as they are because they have been totally misled, misinformed and disinformed by their own leaders in the

British Medical Association? Will my right hon. and learned Friend constantly try to fight off those lying attacks, particularly the claim that the aim of the review is to cut back expenditure in the National Health Service?

Mr. Clarke: The Government have increased expenditure on the NHS more than any Government. I assure my hon. Friend—if she needs reassurance—that all our plans for the future are based on the expectation that expenditure on the NHS will need to increase in line with rising demands and changes in demography.

Similarly, my proposals are not aimed at any cutting of costs in general practice, and are certainly not aimed at cutting the average remuneration of doctors. What we are seeking to do is use resources to the best effect for patients, and to use rewards for doctors in a way that encourages higher standards of service.

Mr. Leighton: Is the Secretary of State aware that I have conducted a poll among all the doctors in my constituency, in which 47 voted against his proposals and three in favour? Is he aware that their letters were accompanied by impassioned criticism of his proposals? What notice is he prepared to take of their representations?

Mr. Clarke: I am meeting thousands of doctors, and so are my ministerial colleagues. We are taking serious account of all constructive representations put to us. It is pointless to consider accounts of straightforward votes of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman has referred unless we know whether they concern the contract or the White Paper; if the White Paper, what part of it; and what proposals they are putting forward.

I find that discussions with doctors who are seriously committed to the Health Service—as the great body of doctors are in this country—lead to much more productive results than votes, leaflets or the campaigns to which we have been subjected in the past week or two.

Patients (Treatment)

3. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in National Health Service hospitals in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures for 1978.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Freeman): Between calendar year 1978 and fiscal year 1987-88 total annual in-patient cases for England increased by 23 per cent. from 5·4 million to 6·6 million. Over the same period, day cases rose by almost ½ million and out-patient attendances by over 2¾ million.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that these figures provide the best evidence of the improvement and expansion of the National Health Service since this Government came into office because they show a substantial increase in the number of patients being treated?

Mr. Freeman: The figures underline the success this Government have had, with a 40 per cent. increase in real terms in expenditure on the National Health Service. For the year just commenced, there is a £2 billion increase in resources.

Dr. Moonie: Can the Minister comment on the waiting lists in the corresponding period and say what he will do about them?

Mr. Freeman: Over the last 10 years, waiting lists have gone down by 8 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* True. Regarding the west midlands, waiting lists in my hon. Friend's constituency and the surrounding region have gone down by 19 per cent.

Mr. Hayes: Is my hon. Friend aware that the South Glamorgan health authority has contracted out all its open-heart surgery to a private hospital in Southampton? This means that patients are getting speedy care absolutely free to the patients and at a lower cost to the National Health Service. Is that not precisely what we are trying to do in the White Paper?

Mr. Freeman: There are many examples—and doubtless there will be more—of good co-operation between the private and public sectors.

"Working for Patients"

4. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received from doctors in rural areas about his National Health Service reform proposals in the "Working for Patients" document.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. David Mellor): We have received a number of representations and will take them carefully into account in implementing our proposals.

Mrs. Michie: Will the Minister give details of the people and institutions that he consulted before he produced his White Paper document and proposals, particularly those in relation to rural general practices?

Mr. Mellor: I do not know whether the hon. Lady is referring to the White Paper or the contract. There were considerable discussions of the contract prior to its publication by the Secretary of State after no less than 12 months' negotiations with the doctors' representatives. That document includes most of the material about rural practices. The process of consultation has not yet ended. The Secretary of State has already made it clear that he and his fellow Ministers are meeting regularly with general practitioners, and we shall certainly bear in mind the points that they make on those issues.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: General practitioners' income is to rely to a greater extent on capitation. Will this not mean that doctors in rural areas will be rather worse off as a result of the change and, in those circumstances, should not the rural allowance be left in place?

Mr. Mellor: I do not believe that doctors will be worse off, because we intend to pay a rural supplement to recognise the particular problems of doctors in rural areas. There has been some concern because of the aged definition of "rural" used in some cases. Areas that are actually no longer rural have been benefiting from some of the rural payments. We believe that our policy will enhance the position of rural practitioners. All points to the contrary are being borne carefully in mind before we make our final decision.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome that assurance, but is the Minister aware that there is great concern that the small

rural practices which have been giving good service believe that they will be penalised under the new system? Will the Minister accept that the consultation time of 20 hours face to face in surgery may not really be a useful basis on which to work, especially when one allows for home calls?

Mr. Mellor: In making that determination, we have borne home calls in mind but, as I have said, all points are being considered. In a number of cases rural practitioners have smaller lists, and to make allowance for that we intend to pay an enhanced capitation fee for practices between 500 to 1,500. In the exceptional circumstances of highly rural communities, where it is justifiable that the practitioner has under 500 patients, it might be possible to pay such a person under the inducement payment scheme, which recognises the exceptional problems of highly scattered areas. I hope that in that respect we shall ensure that rural practice is enhanced and not diminished by our proposals.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. and learned Friend accept that in the rural areas the quality of medicine, and particularly the motivation of the general practitioners, has been very high, because the quality of life has encouraged good GPs to take up practice? There is nothing to the contrary in the Government's White Paper. Certainly the proposals we have for Scotland show clearly that all this is taken on board and we shall continue to enjoy this quality of service.

Mr. Mellor: I warmly endorse my hon. Friend's remarks.

NHS (Leicestershire)

5. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the state of the National Health Service in Leicestershire.

Mr. Mellor: Leicestershire has benefited substantially from the extra money that the Government have made available—almost £200 million this year to Leicestershire health authority compared with £177 million last year, which is a real terms increase of some 2·4 per cent. There has been a substantial investment in new and improved facilities, including a new community hospital at Coalville opened in 1988 at a cost of £3·3 million, and further phases of Glenfield general hospital and Leicester royal infirmary, which are due to open in August 1990 and July 1991 respectively.

Mr. Vaz: Is the Minister aware that, despite those mythical millions, currently 16,000 Leicestershire people are on the waiting list, more than 1,000 of whom have been waiting for longer than one year? Is he aware also that in Leicestershire, it takes 12 months to have a hearing aid fitted after referral from a GP? The Leicester royal infirmary has overspent its budget by £750,000 to protect local hospital services. Is the Minister further aware that last Friday I met general practitioners in my constituency, many of whom were lifelong supporters of the Conservative party, and many of whom said that their patients will suffer and in some cases die if the Government's doctor-capping proposals are brought into effect? When will the Government defend the National Health Service rather than destroy it?

Mr. Mellor: There can be nothing mythical about the work being done at Glenfield and at Leicester royal infirmary, which will result in 700 new beds at a cost of more than £30 million. There can be nothing mythical about the fact that in the years 1982-86, some £47 million was spent on capital works in that district. However, there was something mythical about capital spend in the late 1970s under the Labour Government, when only £1 million was spent in 1978-79. We have increased that figure tenfold every year.

Mr. Latham: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that Rutland people warmly welcome the offer of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health to visit Oakham and—in view of Leicestershire health authority's regrettable decision to close Oakham maternity unit—to talk to people there about rural services? Can an early date be set for that visit?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is for ever using his Away Day ticket to travel to such meetings. It is a regrettable fact that when there is massive capital expenditure on major facilities in a district such as Leicestershire, it is necessary also to close smaller facilities. That is particularly so with maternity units, where the necessity to continue reducing perinatal mortality means that larger maternity units are needed. I understand the stress and difficulty that such decisions sometimes cause local communities, which is why we have a system in which community health councils can object and in which, ultimately, Ministers can make a separate determination as to whether a closure is justified.

NHS (Performance-related Pay)

6. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now make public details of performance-related payments made to managers in the National Health Service and state in each case why such payments have been made.

Mr. Mellor: No, Sir.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Does the Minister accept that the 100,000 Wakefield people who petitioned against the proposed closure of Snapethorpe hospital in my constituency have a right to know whether a district health authority general manager having a salary of £35,000 per year will receive a cash bonus for achieving the closure of that hospital?

Mr. Mellor: Snapethorpe hospital has not had a patient in it since 1984. I know that the hon. Gentleman has been pursuing a vendetta against the district general manager concerned but he cannot blame that manager for obeying the instructions of the health authority rather than those of the hon. Gentleman.

Consultants

8. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made with the plans to create 100 new posts for consultants.

Mr. Mellor: On 13 April we wrote to all regional health authorities setting out the criteria and inviting them to "bid" for those posts. The posts will be targeted on the six specialties that account for 80 per cent. of patients who have waited more than one year for treatment, but bids

can be made for any specialty. We expect to inform regions by October which of their bids have been successful. The first new consultants under the scheme could be in post by the end of the year.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful to the Minister for that helpful reply, which will be particularly welcomed by junior doctors. However, when it comes to considering the bids from the regions, may I ask him to look very carefully at west Norfolk, where expenditure on the Health Service has risen very sharply in real terms, but where the growth of population is among the fastest in the country?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend makes two good points. I certainly agree with what he says about his region. It is important to bear in mind not only the 100 new consultants proposed in the White Paper, but the massive expansion in the number of consultants proposed under "Achieving a Balance". The number of consultants in this country, which was 14,500 in 1987, will increase to 19,500 by 1998. That will increase the ability of junior hospital doctors to become consultants—which, of course, is a legitimate ambition of all of them—and will mean that consultants can play a fuller part in covering some of those duties which at present lead to junior hospital doctors being on call for unacceptable periods.

Mr. Janner: Will the Minister's proposals have any impact whatever on the vast number of people waiting for consultant or other services in physiotherapy? Will they help the children in special schools—such as the Emily Forty school, the Greenacres school, the Long Close school and the Western Park school in my constituency—who cannot walk, and many of whom can scarcely move? There are not enough consultants, doctors or physiotherapists to look after them.

Mr. Mellor: I have already pointed out to the hon. and learned Gentleman, but I think it is worth repeating, that the number of consultants in the country is scheduled to go up by 5,000, or over 30 per cent., over the period. There has never been so much expansion, and, of course, it will take place across the board. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I have answered the hon. and learned Gentleman's question.

British Medical Association

9. **Mr. Adley:** To as the Secretary of State for Health when he next intends to meet the British Medical Association; and what he intends to discuss.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans to meet the BMA, but I have arranged to meet representatives of the medical profession through the joint consultants' committee tomorrow to discuss the implementation of the NHS White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mr. Adley: While thanking my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply, may I ask him please to obtain from the BMA an apology for the distortions with which it is frightening patients? Does he agree with me that if the purpose of its campaign is to persuade Ministers and Conservative Members of Parliament by the mindless barrage of propaganda that it is putting out, it is singularly unsuccessful? The main beneficiary of this propaganda appears to be the advertising agency handling the account. Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept from me that, he and I having been in the House together for more than 19 years, I am more than happy to recommend his advice rather than that of the BMA to my constituents?

Mr. Clarke: I have written to all GPs under contract in England, setting out why we disagree strongly with the five principal assertions made in that leaflet, and why we say that they are all untrue. I have invited GPs to consider whether they want to carry on putting the leaflet in their surgeries, and I am glad to say that I think that many of them do not. I look forward to having sensible negotiations with the BMA, if it will return to constructive proposals, about how to improve general practice in this country. Some of the campaigning on which it is spending such money is not really helping to improve the atmosphere, or the prospects for patient services either.

Mr. James Lamond: When the Secretary of State meets the consultants, as he has said he will, will he ask them if the people appointed to the new consultant posts that he intends to agree to—the 100 posts that have just been mentioned—will accept that they must devote 100 per cent. of their time to the National Health Service, and not, as at present, be permitted to devote as much time as they like to private medicine, using National Health Service facilities, and charging old people, who cannot wait in the queue any longer, exorbitant prices for operations that should be performed free?

Mr. Clarke: Consultants are able to enter into contracts on the present basis with the National Health Service. They can be full-time, and maximum part-time, and so on. What we have ensured in the White Paper is that district health authorities will agree a job description with each consultant each year and will act as the agents of the regional health authorities in ensuring that that job description is, indeed, fulfilled by the consultant. So the consultant will be paid according to the extent of his commitment to the National Health Service, and the district health authorities will be able to ensure that that commitment is carried out.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that much of the confusion in the minds of the public in relation to the proposed reforms of the Health Service stems from a mixing of aspects of the general practitioner contract with proposals set out in the White Paper, and that this misinformation is largely perpetrated by some GPs who do not understand the differences themselves? Will my right hon. and learned Friend take the opportunity for further negotiations to get the GP contract settled, so that discussions about the White Paper reforms may continue, and the beneficial ideas in the White Paper may be discussed and put into practice?

Mr. Clarke: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's analysis. My experience in discussions has been the same as his. I sent to all general practitioners a copy of the White Paper on the National Health Service review and the relevant working papers that related to the White Paper. I sent out separately the proposals for a new contract, in which I described the stage that we had reached in our discussions and negotiations. I asked all general practitioners to read whichever parts that interest them but to keep them apart and made it quite clear that discussions on the contract—where we hope to reach a reasonable conclusion, if people will accept the aims of the new

contract—are one thing and that the evolution of the Health Service review is quite another. A great deal of discussion still has to take place on that while we are getting the details in place. The sooner that we can settle the contract and stop this protracted negotiations battle, the sooner we shall get on with implementing the NHS review.

Mr. Galbraith: When the Minister next discusses the general practitioners' contract with the British Medical Association and the general medical services committee will he deal with the concessions that have been made in the tartan contract—the concessions on basic practice allowance, the retention of the rural practice allowance and the lowering of screening targets? Will those concessions be offered throughout the United Kingdom so that they become the basis for a United Kingdom contract?

Mr. Clarke: I discussed the details of the tartan contract, as the hon. Gentleman described it, with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland before he issued it. That contract reflects in part our reactions to the submissions that we had received on the contract and expresses Scottish conditions. Average list sizes in Scotland are smaller so doctors have, on average, fewer patients. The average level of vaccination is lower and targets are adjusted accordingly. Moreover, doctors serve many scattered rural areas. I shall be interested in the reactions of the general medical services committee and of anybody else to the provisions in the Scottish contract. The Government sought to react to the representations made to us. We have tried to meet local conditions in order to ensure that good practice is encouraged.

NHS (Privatisation)

10. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to privatise the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No, Sir, and I never have had any such plans.

Mr. Nicholson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend sanction a modest amount of public expenditure to enable a special courier to take, by motorcycle, a copy of this exchange to BMA house, Tavistock square, because the BMA may not be aware of that fact? Is it not highly regrettable that those who are in a position to know the truth should seek so fundamentally to mislead their patients and our constituents?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with that, but I do not think that the BMA believes that we have any intention of privatising the NHS, or that we ever had any such intention. I think that the courier should be diverted to Walworth road. As we have seen this afternoon, the Labour party has no particular contribution to make at this stage to the evolution of the review or the doctors' contract. It is continuing to fight a totally bogus battle against a proposition that only the Labour party believes was ever made.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Secretary of State seen a copy of the report that I am holding in my hand from the General Audit Office in America—the American National Accounting Office—to the House of Representatives? It deals with private health care in America, roundly condemns the principle of fixed budgets and says that they lead to a reduction in health care. Will he send a copy of the report to every Member of the House before the next debate on these matters so that we can learn the truth from the experience of general practitioners in the United States of America?

Mr. Clarke: I believe that the British health care system is superior to that in the USA. There are centres of excellence in the United States where extremely high standards of medical care are achieved. There are also centres of excellence where extremely high standards of management and use of resources exist. We could learn from that experience. However, my White Paper proposals have nothing whatever to do with taking the National Health Service in the American direction. We remain firmly committed to the principles upon which the National Health Service is based.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Given that there are wide differences in cost between different hospitals for the same operation, and that waiting lists vary so greatly, has my right hon. and learned Friend received from the BMA—or, indeed, from the Labour party—any suggestion as to how this matter might be dealt with? Is not the Labour party's only vision of the future of the NHS one that is safe for COHSE and NUPE?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend touches on one of the important problems in the National Health Service, and given that there are these apparently inexplicable differences in performance from place to place, it must be a worthwhile objective to so organise the Health Service that we raise standards everywhere to the high level achieved in some places now. I have most certainly received no proposals from the Labour party on that or on any other subject relating to the review. I look forward to receiving constructive proposals from the BMA which address the main point of how to raise standards everywhere for the benefit of patients.

Mr. Robin Cook: Has the Secretary of State read his own White paper? Is he not aware that it is dripping with commitments to privatisation? Will he put the record straight and confirm that GPs with practice budgets will be expected to use NHS money to buy private treatment? Will he confirm that opt-out hospitals will be expected to use NHS facilities to bid for private patients? Will he further confirm that today's Finance Bill contains a cash subsidy to private medicine? Does it not speak volumes for this Government's lack of commitment to a public Health Service that the very first proposal from the White Paper to be brought before the House is a straight cash hand-out to private medicine?

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman has impaled himself on a hook by making such an allegation about privatisation, and he can find no factual basis in the White Paper or anywhere else to justify it. What he is describing are proposals which ensure that patients and GPs have the maximum choice to use National Health Service money to get the best quality service where they can find it, and provided as quickly as possible. That cannot be described as privatisation. It is using the taxpayers' money to the best advantage of the patient, and it is absurd to claim that we should exclude doctors and patients from high-quality

operations provided quickly because we are using excess private sector capacity at a low cost. That is an enhancement of the service and no kind of privatisation at all.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. and learned Friend's answer will be regarded as what it is—clear and the truth. Would it not have been better if the BMA had kept to the truth instead of launching an outrageous campaign to frighten little old ladies and other poor pensioners?

Mr. Clarke: I certainly would welcome it if the BMA withdrew its untruthful leaflet and substituted one which tried to make constructive proposals on the contract. I certainly hope that all doctors will forbear from making untruthful allegations to elderly and vulnerable patients, so causing them needless alarm. The contract seeks to enhance services to elderly people and I trust that doctors will acknowledge that and seek to build on it.

Mentally Handicapped and Mentally Ill People

11. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the numbers of mentally ill and mentally handicapped people who, after being discharged from hospital, subsequently became homeless.

Mr. Freeman: We have received representations from voluntary bodies and individuals about the level of support available to patients discharged from hospital, some of these expressing concern that such patients risk becoming homeless.

Mr. Ashley: Has the Minister read the report "Slipping through the Net" by the National Schizophrenia Fellowship? Is he aware that it is a terrible condemnation of the Government that schizophrenics and other mentally ill and mentally handicapped people are so deprived of community care that they end up on the streets, in prisons or in coffins? Does he accept that the only answer is first, to stop closing the hospitals and secondly, to provide adequate resources for these very desperate people?

Mr. Freeman: I have read the report that the right hon. Gentleman cites and I can make it quite plain that no mental illness hospital should or will close unless there are adequate facilities in the community for the care of those who have been discharged from hospital, or have not been in hospital. Next week, we shall be issuing guidelines to district health authorities as to how they are to put in place by 1991 adequate community care facilities for the mentally ill.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: In associating myself entirely with the remarks of the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) I must tell my hon. Friend that his remarks are totally untrue. Many mentally ill or mentally handicapped people are homeless or in prison because psychiatric hospitals and hospitals for the mentally handicapped have been closed prematurely without adequate accommodation and trained personnel in the community to look after them. Will he ensure that no further psychiatric hospitals close?

Mr. Freeman: Perhaps my hon. Friend did not catch what I said in reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). I repeat that we endorse the policy which has been in place for 30 years of moving those who are mentally ill from the large, isolated Victorian asylums to proper facilities in the community. I agree with my hon. Friend that the challenge is to provide proper community care facilities.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Callaghan: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Select Committee on the Environment recently produced a report about the disposal of toxic waste and that the chairman said that only God knows what time bomb we are sitting on because of fears that toxic chemicals will get into our water supply? Is she further aware that the Select Committee unanimously condemned the Department of the Environment for its lack of leadership and control? In view of the Prime Minister's statement that the present Secretary of State for the Environment is the best there has ever been, how does she reconcile those two views? Who is telling the truth?

The Prime Minister: I speak from my recollection of reading that full report, but if the hon. Gentleman looks at the list of action taken, he will find that action by the Government goes back to 1983. Our action in regard to beaches goes back to 1979. The Labour party did nothing about the beaches directive for four years and we had to take immediate action. As I have pointed out, there will be another major Bill to implement the consultation that we have had this year.

Mr. Dickens: Does the Prime Minister agree that our doctors are the custodians of the nation's health but that by the same token, they are also procurement officers on behalf of the taxpayer and the National Health Service, collectively placing orders worth millions of pounds every day? If we are to have a cost-effective and efficient Health Service, we have to make provision for an aging population. Is it not therefore a pity that we are subjected to the politics of fear, envy and myth which, in one word, is Socialism?

The Prime Minister: I am very glad to see my hon. Friend back, clearly absolutely recovered. In addition to what he has said, for every £1 that was spent on the Health Service in 1979, £3 is spent today, on more doctors, more nurses, more and better hospitals and very much better care of which he has probably been a recent beneficiary.

Mr. Kinnock: When two thirds of the people of West Germany are against the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons, are not the German Government absolutely right to act on their view?

The Prime Minister: Short-range nuclear weapons are part of the NATO strategy. NATO strategy is being discussed and NATO strategy cannot be determined by any one country.

Mr. Kinnock: When we are told that the Warsaw pact has a 16:1 advantage in short-range nuclear weapons, does it not make sense for Britain and for NATO to gain the most by negotiating their verifiable removal?

The Prime Minister: I thoroughly agreed on that point with an early-day motion which appeared on the Order Paper on 9 February 1989 congratulating

"the Socialist Prime Minister of France on his . . . statement . . . that 'conventional and nuclear weapons are jointly necessary for the security of Europe', . . .that 'despite some initial signs of an unquestionable desire for disarmament in the Soviet camp, we are still far from seeing the reasonable sufficiency or the defensive posture that they claim', and that we must avoid having disarmament 'become a smokescreen for denuclearisation.'"

That was tabled by a Labour Member.

Mr. Kinnock: I am glad to hear the Prime Minister quoting a Socialist President. I quote to her a Conservative Chancellor. Does she agree that there should be

"'early negotiations on short-range nuclear weapons based on the goal announced by the Alliance in Reykjavik in 1987 and in Brussels in 1988 to achieve equal numbers at lower levels' and . . . 'negotiations on nuclear artillery with the aim of achieving equal ceilings at levels that are drastically reduced'"

That is the view of Chancellor Kohl.

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman could have heard my first answer to him—*[Interruption.]* The strategy that we are discussing is the strategy of NATO, which has protected peace for 40 years. It is the strategy which the right hon. Gentleman does not accept and which he wishes to throw away. The strategy on which he is engaged is to get the denuclearisation of Europe and to have no safety left in defence in NATO for this country.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are many parliamentarians both here and on the continent of Europe who share her deep concern about the West German Government proposal to start talks on short-range nuclear weapons with the Warsaw pact countries unilaterally in advance of reductions in chemical weapons and conventional forces?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. NATO has played a vital role in maintaining Germany's freedom, which started the day the second world war ended, and I do not believe that the German Government want to put NATO at risk.

Q2. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Illsley: In view of the fact that in February of this year the south Yorkshire police instructed Barnsley football club to admit 2,000 spectators to an FA cup match at one minute before the kick-off without payment and without tickets, will the Prime Minister now consider delaying the Football Spectators Bill until after Lord Justice Taylor reports or, even better, withdraw it altogether as such police action clearly makes that Bill unworkable?

The Prime Minister: I answered some questions from this Dispatch Box last week pointing out that there had been nearly 300 deaths in the post-war period from crush and hooliganism in football, that unless we had a Bill we should be unable to take any action contained in the measure apart from the national membership scheme and that I believed that, against that number of deaths, for the House to wash its hands of such a Bill would be negligent in the extreme.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone of reputable character—a public company, a national newspaper or a child playing in the street—on finding documents or property lost, stolen or fallen off the back of a lorry, would, as their first action, seek to return it to its rightful owner?

Mr. Tony Banks: Not in my constituency.

Mr. Baker: Should not all thieves be treated equally before the law?

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend says is correct and most people would agree.

Mr. Ashdown: What is the limit, if any, below which the Prime Minister would not be prepared to let child benefit be cut?

The Prime Minister: Our policy on child benefit has been set out. We increased child benefit to the poorest families, which gave them far more help than they would have had if there had been an across-the-board increase. I am happy to say that that policy was endorsed by a majority of 100 yesterday evening.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind that we are this month marking the 40th anniversary of NATO, will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to discuss with her colleagues at the Department of the Environment the recent decision by Norwich city council to throw out an exhibition which was installed to mark the 40th anniversary of NATO? Does she agree that that Labour-controlled council has pointed up the Opposition's confusion on defence matters?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes his point effectively. NATO has kept the peace in Europe for over 40 years. We are firmly behind NATO's strategy—which is a mix of conventional and nuclear weapons—as, I believe, are the United States and the overwhelming majority of NATO members. Anything that undermines NATO would be highly damaging to the defence of liberty.

Q4. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the principal achievements her three Administrations has been the way in which the trade unions have been firmly brought under the rule of law? Would she care to say what the effect would be on the economy and on employment of a return to the secondary picketing advocated by Opposition Members?

The Prime Minister: The effect would be utterly devastating. We would go back to secondary strikes, in which there was no dispute between the employer and the employee and we would see again some of the massive strikes that we had in Labour's last period of office, during

which about 13 million days a year were lost through strikes—a situation that would not have been encountered under a Tory Government.

Q7. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that some doctors have behaved in a most irresponsible and non-professional nammer in their treatment of elderly and vulnerable patients—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: The doctors have frightened their elderly and vulnerable patients about the effect of the National Health Service review. Will my right hon. Friend emphasise to the British Medical Association—the doctors' trade union—before its conference on Thursday, that it should stop using patients as a political battering ram and should instead sit down to discuss the proposals with the Department of Health?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health answered the doctors effectively in some of the letters which he sent in reply to them. There are more doctors with more resources than ever before in the Health Service and the objective of the National Health Service White Paper is to give better health care, to give greater choice and to produce greater satisfaction and rewards for those who work in the NHS and who successfully respond to local needs. The changes proposed in remuneration before the White Paper are planned to distribute the same amount of money to doctors, but by way of distributing more to those who have a bigger case load than to those who have a smaller case load. That seems eminently just.

8. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: Is the Prime Minister aware that there is an important Roman site in Upper Thames street near St. Paul's cathedral, which is the site of the palace of Julius Agricola, a former governor of London?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question must have to do with the Prime Minister's responsibilities.

Mr. Banks: The site is threatened by office development and there are difficulties with English Heritage and the developers about compensation that might be paid if the development is kept in abeyance while archaeological inspection continues. Will the Prime Minister please look at the matter urgently because the site is of great significance not only to London but to the nation?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the site and of its importance. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be in touch with the Department of the Environment, under which English Heritage comes. If it comes to a final decision on planning, that would be for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to determine.

Mr. Frank Field: Is the Prime Minister aware that the first compensation payments will shortly be paid from the Hillsborough disaster fund? Is she also aware that the poorest families may—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Field: Is the Prime Minister aware that the first payments will shortly be paid from the Hillsborough disaster fund? Is she also aware that the poorest families may, as a result of gaining help from that fund, lose their entitlement to social security payments? As I cannot believe that the nation contributed generously to that fund so that the Treasury would be the net beneficiary, and because I do not believe that the Treasury would wish to be the net beneficiary, will the right hon. Lady undertake to review the disregard rules so that the poorest families can gain help from that fund and keep their social security payments?

The Prime Minister: First, I am not sure what the status of the Hillsborough disaster fund will be. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, other funds have chosen to have charitable status, but I am not sure what decision has been made about the Hillsborough fund and that will affect the way in which the payments are made. Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman knows, other disaster funds have had charitable status and they must have worked out a reasonable way forward on this matter. I do not think that we can change the rules and regulations, but I shall look to see how similar funds have worked.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Secretary of State for Education and Science published a consultation document proposing that university and college tuition fees should more than doubled. Under the guise of measures allegedly aimed at bringing market forces into higher education, the Secretary of State's announcement marks the beginning of the end of free tuition—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to know what the point of order is for me.

Mr. Straw: I am just coming to the point of order, if I am allowed to do so. The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) seems to think that she is the Speaker.

That announcement marks—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must hear what the point of order is.

Mr. Straw: That announcement marks the beginning of the end of free tuition in higher education, as the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), said.

The Secretary of State held a press conference this morning at 10 o'clock, at which he said that those changes were "big and exciting".

Have you, Mr. Speaker, had any intimation of an oral statement by the Secretary of State? Do you agree that if big and exciting changes are to be announced, before any press conference is called the Secretary of State should come to the House—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must be allowed to hear what is being said.

Mr. Straw: Is not the Secretary of State's failure to come to the House to make a statement one more example of the way in which Ministers increasingly seek to avoid their responsibility to the House, the elected Chamber, and through us to the public?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no indication that there was to be a statement, but I am aware that a consultation document has been issued and that it is in the Library.

Mr. Straw: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You, have responsibilities to the House for the rights of hon. Members on both sides of the House who are not in the Government. According to the Secretary of State, there are "big and exciting" change. My point of order is: should announcements like that be made at a press conference seven hours before they could be made in the House? Should the Secretary of State then avoid his responsibilities by refusing to make a statement in the House where he could be questioned on the changes?

Mr. Speaker: I am aware that a consultation document was issued. I always deprecate the fact that statements are made to the press before they are made in the House. That is not my responsibility, but I hope that it will not occur.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Obviously this is no reflection on the Chair, but as the months pass we witness Ministers having to be dragged to the House to make important statements. We all bear in mind the inner cities statement, which eventually we got made in the House, and last week's Prime Minister's Question Time when the Prime Minister started to read what was obviously a statement. Will you take advice from senior Members on both sides to ensure that we do not have a repetition of constant contempt for the House by Her Majesty's Government?

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have witnessed two appalling abuses of the system. If the Labour party wishes to bring to the attention of the House important matters, as is its right, the proper way to do it is through a private notice question. Anything else is sheer laziness.

Mr. Speaker: A private notice question is a matter for me.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. When an hon. Member gets up to make a point of order, he may be right or wrong. That is a decision for you. Will you draw to the attention of hon. Members, particularly those on the Government Benches, the fact that when the Reichstag decided to shout down every opposition Member it led eventually to no freedom, no democracy and a form of Fascism—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making an important point, and I wish to hear it.

Mr. Heffer: Equally, the same thing happened in Italy under Mussolini. I do not intend—*[Interruption.]* What is happening now is an example of what I mean. Will you, Mr. Speaker, explain to hon. Members that democracy means freedom of speech and that in the last analysis you are the judge of what is a point of order, instead of hon. Members screaming their heads off because they do not agree with it?

Mr. Speaker: We have a very heavy day ahead of us. Many right hon. and hon. Gentlemen wish to participate in the Second Reading debate on the Finance Bill. Points of order will delay the debate and will mean, unhappily, that some hon. Members will not be called.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Baldry. It must be a point of order that I can answer and not a comment upon what has been said.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Further to the point of order of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), Mr. Speaker. Because of the brouhaha to which he referred, it was difficult to hear whether the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was objecting to the fact that the Government intend to provide more funds for higher education, increase participation in higher education and increase access for higher education.

Mr. Speaker: It is a well-known practice over many years for the Chair to be asked on a point of order, whether there has been any indication that there is to be a statement. That is what I was asked. That is in order. What is not in order is to do that with a long preamble. In the circumstances I do not believe that it was an over-long preamble today. I listened to the point of order and I ruled upon it.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not clear that the Chair is being constantly embarrassed by a practice which you, Sir, and the Committee on Procedure have deplored? You, as you rightly say, have very limited powers, but I suggest that you have two powers which could perhaps strengthen your approach to the Government about Ministers and their duties to the House. Will you make it clear, in backing up what you have said in deploring Ministers' actions, that when Ministers ignore the House, as the House was ignored this morning—you will use your powers to grant PNQs and SO20 applications? In this way you will give back to the House the rights of which the Government are trying to rob it.

Mr. Speaker: It has long been the convention that information should be given to the House before it is given to anyone outside. I hope that that will continue to be the case. I have made my views known very clearly on this point.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall take one more point of order from each side.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you were aware that the objection was not to the reference by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to lodgment in the Library of statements about new policy but to the highly charged political preamble to the point of order which he made and to which Government Members quite rightly objected.

I want to ask a question which is linked to that but perhaps raises a more important point of order. Is it not the convention that when hon. Members cannot be here they let your Office know so that you do not have the embarrassment of calling their questions? Further to that, there appeared to be—unwittingly on your part perhaps—a certain amount of confusion when you called my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), who was not here, and then did not go on to call the next Member with a question on the Order Paper but called another hon. Member to ask a supplementary question on the previous question.

Mr. Speaker: As to the first point, I suspect that what happened was that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) heard the news at 1 o'clock in which it was stated that a Government statement had been made outside the House. I also heard that. I think that that was what his point of order related to.

As to the second point, I decide who is called at Question Time. I do it as fairly as I can to ensure that every hon. Member, particularly those who have not yet had an opportunity to put a question to the Prime Minister, shall be able to do so rather than call those who have perhaps been able to ask several questions.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that yesterday I managed to table three early-day motions relating to the phone-tapping activities by Mr. Coghlan on behalf of Lonrho against the Al Fayeds. Today I went to the Table Office and was told that a motion written in precisely the same terms could not be accepted on the basis—indeed I had been told last night that there was some concern about these matters—that it summarised statements made by persons outside the House.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that you are in the course of a period of consultation and that it is likely that, following upon that consultation, you may seek to change, or reinterpret, the rules governing the tabling of early-day motions in such a way that I would be unable to table the motion. I regard any attempt to interfere with my right to table a motion of this nature as an intrusion on my rights as a Member of the House. I am joined in that view by many of my hon. Friends, whom I consulted this morning and who feel very strongly about this matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should not have raised this point of order today when, as he correctly said, I am considering the whole matter. The hon. Gentleman has three motions on the Order Paper today which quote extracts from speeches made by others outside the House. It is not the function of an early-day motion to have written into the record speeches made by persons outside the House. An early-day motion, by definition, must be capable of debate. Long quotations from speeches by people outside the House are not capable of debate. I am, as I said, considering the matter. It is not a question of denying the hon. Gentleman's rights. I am trying to protect the rights of the House by ensuring that the Order Paper is not abused.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are aware of the difficulties that we have had in this Parliament over the staffing of Scottish business Committees, including Select Committees and Standing Committees. I seek your advice and guidance.

This morning in the Scottish Standing Committee considering the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill, a Labour Back-Bench Member was also serving on another Committee—not an unusual situation; I have had to do it many times myself. A Division was called in the other Committee which was debating purely English business and a Division was simultaneously called in the Scottish Committee. The proceedings in the Scottish Committee were held up and the Chairman had to keep the doors open to allow the Labour Back Bencher—*[Interruption.]* This is very important, Mr. Speaker. I have been locked out of Committee Rooms in similar circumstances.

I want your guidance, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members from Scottish constituencies are serving on two Standing Committees. This morning the hon. Member concerned was the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and the Committee doors were kept open to allow him back to vote in the Division. I want a clear ruling from you, Mr. Speaker. Does that apply to all hon. Members? I would like that practice to be extended to me when I am serving on two Committees at the same time.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am not responsible for what happens in the Committee Corridor. I can see that the hon. Gentleman may have a serious problem. He should refer it to the Procedure Committee.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to an earlier point of order, Mr. Speaker. On the question of early-day motions, would it be a preferable alternative to refer the matter to the Procedure Committee instead of accepting

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

the entire responsibility yourself? That is the advice that you usually give if difficulties arise on the Floor of the House.

As you will appreciate, the early-day motion procedure is a very important and much cherished means of raising issues which we know will never be debated, although there is the saving grace that there is a possibility of debate. However, no early-day motion has been debated since I have been in, or out of this House, since 1974.

I recall when the Consolidated Fund gave rise to a genuine debate and was not arbitrarily divided into Adjournment debates. That change was not brought about by the Procedure Committee submitting its recommendations to the House. It was arrived at by dealing with the various Back-Bench groups. As Back Benchers have over the years lost a significant number of opportunities in this House which has traditionally always provided opportunities for individuals to raise issues, it would be better if the early-day motion matter went to the Procedure Committee and for the House to consider its report.

Mr. Speaker: An early-day motion on the Order Paper must be capable of being debated. It is an abuse of the Order Paper to table three early-day motions which effectively writes someone else's speech into the Order Paper. I am considering the matter and perhaps the Procedure Committee should look at it. The sadness is that, if the Procedure Committee considers it, it may make the procedure more restrictive than I would by bringing it back strictly to what it always was.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will agree that Members of Parliament can hardly be expected to carry out the onerous functions of their office if they are dying of thirst. Therefore, you will have every sympathy with the three Labour Members who brought the Leeds to King's Cross express to a halt at Huntingdon last week——

Mr. Speaker: Order. They may have done, but they did not do it in this Chamber. That has nothing to do with me, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Mr. Hamilton *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not having that; I am sorry.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to revert to the matters raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). Will you, Mr. Speaker, make clear for the sake of accuracy and the record, that the three early-day motions under consideration do not directly quote anyone and, clearly, in their present form are capable of debate? I ask you, Mr. Speaker, not to take any decisions on this matter in principle until you have had the opportunity to consider a further early-day motion from my hon. Friend the Member for Workington. If the motions were in order, as they clearly were when accepted, it would be unfair and a removal of our rights if you changed the rules overnight.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was not present when I discussed with the hon. Member for Workington, his early-day motions. He is well aware of my views on the other two motions, which he did not table last night—and he agreed not to proceed with them.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Any move by you to restrict the number of early-day motions would be most welcome to the vast majority of hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker: I am seeking to restrict not early-day motions, but the use to which they are put. I have come to no firm conclusion about this, and am still considering the matter. It is certainly not my intention to make matters more difficult for Back Benchers. As the House knows, I believe that Back Benchers should be given every opportunity, within the rules.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has attempted to table a further early-day motion today——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may have done, but I have not seen it yet.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that what I have to say is of general interest to the House. When the Leader of the Opposition seeks to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, he always does so, which is quite right. When the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal party, who is one of the more boring and irrelevant politicians in this place, seeks to catch your eye, he always seems to do so—be that as it may. What concerns me is that when the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), the leader of the Social Democrats, who, although we may disagree with him, normally has something interesting to say, seeks to catch your eye, he is not always called. On behalf of the House, may I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to be more sympathetic with your eye to the leader of the SDP than to the leader of the Liberal party?

Mr. Speaker: The House would be wise to proceed with the Finance Bill debate. I have the difficult task of deciding who is called at Question Time. I seek to be as fair as possible.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) or anybody else decided to put down what is known as a take-note early-day motion, may I take it that, providing that it contained no exact quotations, it would be allowed? As some of the take-note motions put down by the Government are of that kind, would you, Mr. Speaker, say how many words attributed to statements would be allowed? Would it be 20, 30, 40, or what? Will you assure me that, if I signed those three motions today, the names would be accepted because they are on the Order Paper? Will you bear in mind that my hon. Friend's new motion does not contain any quotations?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a distinguished chairman of another assembly, and I shall take note of what he has said. Whether he signs the motions will not have any direct influence on my decision, but I shall take note of what he has said.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We live in a somewhat authoritarian political climate. You have the unique

responsibility of defending the rights of Members. Sir, you and I have been friends for some years now—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that this point of order may be helpful.

Mr. Faulds: I say with my usual love and admiration for you, Mr. Speaker, that your responsibility in these particularly difficult times is not to allow Members' interests and rights to be diminished but to try to extend them.

Not having spoken in the House since 30 November last year, I rise today to say that I must make the comment, with all charity—this is very relevant—that there has been a change in the conduct of matters within the House. You, Mr. Speaker, have changed the taking of points of order; you have allowed quotations in supplementaries. Sir, when you and I had a slight tiff at the end of last year, I wanted, having damaged the door and having immediately agreed to pay for it—which I have since done, by kind permission of my bank manager—to make a statement to the House apologising personally to you, Sir, and to my colleagues for my slight tantrum. The door, of course, had suffered damage on previous occasions; it was only my Scottish shoulders that actually budged it. But you, Sir, did not allow me to make a personal statement when I very much wanted to do so.

Now that I am on my feet again, and intend to rise frequently on a number of occasions, I think that the conduct of these matters—which has changed, Sir, under your Speakership—should really be examined by the relevant Procedure Committee——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is very helpful, and I am touched by what he has said. He wrote me a very full letter of apology, and I was grateful for it.

I must stress to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that I am not in the business of changing the rules; I am in the business of upholding them. If there is an abuse of any matter in the Chamber, it is my undoubted duty to look into it carefully, and that is exactly what I am doing.

Unique Personal Identity Number

3.56 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to introduce a unique personal identity number for all persons born after 1st January 1990 and for other residents on application.

The Bill would provide for a universally applied identity number for all persons born after 1 January 1990, and for any other United Kingdom resident on application. That would allow public authorities and private institutions increasingly to utilise a standard reference which would assist in the detection of benefit, tax and credit fraud, and other crimes. Furthermore, it would provide opportunities to facilitate passport issuing, crowd control—not least at football matches—and the rapid identification of accident victims, together with their medical records and intentions relating to organ donation.

At present, a multiplicity of reference numbers applies to every one of us. We start off with the registrar, who no doubt puts a number on our birth certificate. We then move on to the NHS, which provides yet another number. We then progress to the education authorities, some of which apply a number. We may call on the services of the social services departments; a minority of us will then receive yet another number. At the age of 16 we are given a national insurance number. When we start work, the Inland Revenue provides us with a number linked to the PAYE system, and should we fall on hard times the Department of Social Security will apply yet another number—and the district council will give us a housing benefit number, to boot.

We are given another number for our driving licence, this one giving away our date of birth to those who can interpret it. When we travel abroad we are given yet another number—a passport number—and, by the grace of the Government, we are shortly to have a community charge number. Finally, if we fall foul of the law, we are given a police national computer number.

Sir John Boreham, head of the Government Statistical Service, said in 1985 that the process was "all rather ramshackle." We have no common denominator; the whole system is confused. Every Member of Parliament finds himself weighted down, his pockets bulging with different cards of identification. My Bill recommends that the Registrar General at the time of birth should record for every individual a number with six digits showing the date of birth, two letters showing registration district and numbers to differentiate uniquely between individuals. The registrar would solely register the full name of the individual, the date and the place of birth and his current address—this last being the only variable that would be changed; at the time of change of address, with forms issued through the Post Office for that purpose. The data would be available for the verification of other organisations, which would be able to check off their data against the list and a charge to them would fund the whole exercise. The sophisticated computers we find nowadays in so many organisations would enable the matching of records with the provision of exception reporting.

Which organisations should have access to the use of such records? They should be the public authorities authorised by this House: they should be those involved in criminal inquiries and recognised credit institutions authorised by the Bank of England, and this for

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

verification of data provided by the individual only. The advantages of such an identity number would be to combat benefit fraud, for there is nothing so corrosive to our constituents than the knowledge that some of their neighbours may be effectively fiddling the benefit system by exploiting the lack of verified information by different organisations. Far too frequently the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, and this fact is compounded by the revenue-collecting agencies, particularly in respect of moonlighting activities.

Equally, we should make this facility available to the credit-granting agencies. Their inability to verify sources of funds and liabilities of potential borrowers not infrequently leads to fraud. A common reference number would facilitate both positive and negative checking of the existence of alternative accounts. For Labour Members who may be in some doubt, I point out that this system would provide potential for stamping out multiple share applications and the like.

The Lindopp committee, which reported in 1978, said:

"It can be argued that if a single and unique identifier were given to every member of the population and if it were to be used by all data users on all occasions, the overall cost to users might be reduced. It could also be argued that the citizen too would benefit by not having to remember or record different means of identification for each of his many activities.

But the use of such a universal identifier in many different data handling activities would also create another facility. It would make it easier and cheaper, especially with the use of computers, to relate or merge the information about individuals held in different sets of records. This could be said to yield a substantial gain in administrative efficiency both in the public and the private sector, especially for organisations dealing with large numbers of people."

Perhaps more succinctly Philip Redfern, in a paper to the Royal Statistical Society last year, claimed that

"the principal advantages to be found in such a system would be that it would provide a brake on fraud, crime and illegal immigration, and lead to a fairer society so that burdens and duties were fairly shared and benefits and rights went only to those entitled to them. To put it another way, freedom should not extend to the freedom to cheat the rest of the community."

I believe that this Bill is particularly relevant in light of the Hillsborough disaster and the Taylor inquiry, and the Football Spectators Bill currently before Parliament. Clubs would have a common identifier which they could use to ban undesirable elements by means of their own issue of magnetic cards or otherwise. Equally, in the tragic case of fatal accidents, victims could be identified by reference numbers on documents, for instance on driving licences. An inquiry made by radio by the emergency services to central records would identify important factors such as the victim's blood group, allergies or other medical conditions. In the event of death, organ donation intentions—which often involve critical time factors—would also be known.

What of 1992 and the European context? Identity cards are compulsory in Belgium, West Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain, and, in accordance with those countries' laws, must be carried at all times. In Italy and Greece, identity cards are issued but need not be carried —right hon. and hon. Members can make what they will of those two countries. Cards are also presumed to be compulsory, but actually are not, in France. The use of an identity number such as that which I propose is the practice adopted in Denmark and in Sweden. It is only in the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands that no identity number system exists.

The Bill provides an opportunity to air an important subject, and it is a nettle that the House should grasp. Admittedly it will create problems in safeguarding civil liberties. They must be overcome, but the proposal offers terrific practical advantages. I hope that the debate will commence.

4.5 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): It is interesting that a party that is supposedly concerned with the rights and freedoms of the individual should be associated with such a proposed measure, which is totalitarian in concept. Listening to the hon. Gentleman's comments about "undesirable elements," "blood groups," and the rest, one is reminded that last week marked the centenary of Hitler's birth. Hitler also was fanatical about identity numbers, blood groups and undesirable elements. As one listened to the hon. Gentleman making his insane proposals, one wondered whether the identity number he proposes for every person born after 1 January next year will perhaps be tatooed on their wrists or arms. No doubt that would be a better and more effective way of identifying the individual concerned.

It may be argued that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) does not represent mainstream Tory opinion.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Yes he does.

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend says that he does. We shall know very shortly whether that is so, because there will be a Division. We certainly have no intention of allowing such a proposal to go through on the nod.

Many right hon. and hon. Members are genuinely and increasingly concerned about the way in which the state controls information about the individual. We are concerned about the effects of information technology and about the way in which civil liberties may be eroded, even without inane proposals of the kind made by the hon. Member for Gravesham.

How many times have we been told that the Government are opposed to state interference, and all the rest of it—yet along comes a Conservative Member suggesting that every individual born from next year should be given a "unique personal identity number."

Mr. Skinner: Mark Thatcher should have had one when he got lost in the desert.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has not been called to help in this debate.

Mr. Winnick: Today, the hon. Member for Gravesham introduces a Bill that will no doubt be defeated. However, how long will it be before No. 10 Downing street comes to the same view and introduces a Government Bill, as it has in respect of an identity card for football spectators? The poll tax and other Government measures originally arose from ten-minute Bills.

My right hon. and hon. Friends should be very much on their guard. In defeating the hon. Gentleman's proposed measure today—and no doubt Ministers will abstain—we should be very much on our guard that No. 10 does not get the idea into its head, so that before long a Minister will come to the Dispatch Box saying, "In all the

circumstances, and bearing in mind undesirable elements, we believe that there should be a unique personal identity number for all people born in this country." The House should defeat this nonsense and no more should be heard about it.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 47, Noes 129.

Division No. 174] **[4.09 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Boswell, Tim
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Janman, Tim
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Marlow, Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bob Dunn and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carrington, Matthew
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dover, Den
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Harris, David
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Irvine, Michael
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Strang, Gavin
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Tony Worthington.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

[Relevant document: Second Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1988-89 on the 1989 Budget (HC288)]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Minister, I must announce to the House that a very large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in this debate. In view of the late start, I propose to limit speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock to 10 minutes, but I hope that hon. Members who may be called before that will bear the limit in mind.

4.21 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Major): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Bill embodies the legislation that flows from my right hon. Friend's Budget. Over the past 10 years we have seen a transformation in economic policy and performance. Policies of demand management and state intervention that failed have been replaced by policies of free enterprise within a sound medium-term framework that have succeeded. The underlying performance of the economy has improved dramatically as a result.

The evidence for this is overwhelming: output has expanded by over 20 per cent. since 1979, business investment has risen to its highest ever level as a proportion of GDP, the public finances are now in large surplus and not in large deficit and there has been a marked rise in productivity and employment and a drastic reduction in inflation. As a result, real living standards are now much higher than they were 10 years ago and have every prospect of improving further.

There are two measures that illustrate the improvements we have seen. First, the performance of our economy has been transformed compared with its own performance in earlier years; but, secondly, and equally importantly, it has also been transformed when compared with the current performance of our competitors. That is why in the 1980s output and investment have grown faster here than in any other major European Community country, a marked contrast to earlier decades, particularly the 1960s and 1970s; and manufacturing productivity has grown faster here than in any other major industrial country, including Japan. In all these measures the United Kingdom was bottom of the league of performance in the 1960s and 1970s. Our position has now dramatically improved.

Also, in the 1980s, small businesses are being created at an unprecedented rate. In the year to March 1989 the net increase in the number of firms registering for VAT was nearly 70,000, an increase of over 40 per cent. on the previous year, which was itself a record. This means that on average over 1,300 new firms are being established every week. I cannot imagine that this has ever happened before in this country. It is noticeably higher than the 1,000 new firms a week we previously claimed.

This is by any yardstick an outstanding record of success and this year's Budget seeks to build on it. But there are difficulties as well which we acknowledge. The Budget was framed against a background of an unwelcome increase in inflation at home and abroad. Inflation in all the major nations is currently at its highest level for three and a half years. In the United Kingdom, current inflationary pressures, although much exaggerated by the perverse effect of mortgage interest payments on the RPI, had their roots in the events of October 1987. At the time of the stock market crash commentators feared that is would precipitate a world wide slide into recession, as it had done in 1929. That fear was shared by many right hon. and hon. Members.

It was precisely to avoid that risk that we, along with the other major industrialised countries, deliberately made sure that monetary conditions at that time were not too tight. We were successful in that aim, in that the effects of the crash were not remotely as bad as we, or anyone else, including Opposition Members, feared. It is clear that the current strength of the world economy owes much to the prompt and co-ordinated action taken by the major nations in the wake of the crash. But it is also clear that in response to the inflationary pressures there has been similar prompt action to tighten monetary policy around the world. I hope, believe and expect that that reflects a worldwide determination to get inflation under control, and to keep it under control.

The Budget was also framed against the background of the current account deficit. This largely reflects an excess of private sector investment over private sector saving, and not the reckless public spending which was the hallmark of previous deficits. It is thus fundamentally different from those of the 1960s and 1970s. The investment boom we are now experiencing underlines the confidence which domestic and foreign investors have in the United Kingdom economy and will stand us in good stead for the future.

Against an international background of rising inflation, this had to be and was a prudent and cautious Budget. That was undoubtedly the right judgment, and it is generally shared. Our long-term aim is a balanced budget, but in the current circumstances my right hon. Friend judged it appropriate to budget for a further year of substantial debt repayment. That means that, in three years, we will have paid back roughly one sixth of the public debt accumulated over two centuries, thus saving about £3 billion a year in interest payments. That saving will continue in each and every future year. The burden of debt interest as a share of GDP will be the lowest since 1915. That both lightens the burden on the shoulders of future taxpayers and, at the same time, leaves room for further tax reductions, further debt repayment or for higher spending on areas we judge to be priorities, and those decisions can be taken in each successive year.

Much of the economy's success is a direct response to the favourable tax structure created by my right hon. Friend and his predecessor in the past 10 years. Successive Budgets have broadened the tax base, lowered tax rates and made the tax system more coherent, more intelligible and a great deal simpler. The tax climate is undoubtedly a significant factor in attracting the stream of welcome inward investment recently and magnificently continued by Fujitsu, Bosch and Toyota. That inward investment, as a result of tax and other changes, should be welcomed by hon. Members in every part of the House—*[Interruption.]*—or nearly every part of the House.

The 1989 Budget made further progress. It contained a major reform of national insurance contributions and the abolition of the pensioners' earnings rule. Those two

measures were considered during the Report stage of the Social Security Bill yesterday. Both have received widespread support. Both will remove significant distortions and disincentives. The reform of national insurance contributions will also increase take-home pay for the majority of those in work by about £3 a week; and the abolition of the earnings rule, long necessary and now effected, will give significant help to pensioners, who will also benefit further from other measures in the Bill.

In his 1987 Budget, my right hon. Friend recognised the special needs of older pensioners by introducing a new and more generous age allowance for those aged 80 and over. Clause 29 extends this higher allowance to people aged between 75 and 79. This will take an additional 15,000 elderly single people and married couples out of tax altogether. In real terms, the age allowance for those aged 75 and over will be 19 per cent. higher than in 1978-79. Three quarters of all those aged 75 and over will not be liable to income tax at all.

The clause also reduces the rate at which the age allowance is withdrawn for those with incomes above the income limit. It is clearly right to concentrate the benefits of the age allowance on elderly people with relatively modest incomes, but we received a number of representations from hon. Members calling for a reduction in the marginal tax rate faced by those with incomes in the withdrawal band. I am pleased that the Budget met these concerns, which were expressed forcibly by hon. Members —among others—in Committee on last year's Finance Bill.

These changes ensure that pensioners keep more of their own money. They also build on what is already an impressive increase in pensioners' incomes. Between 1979 and 1986, the average net incomes of pensioners increased by 23 per cent. in real terms. By contrast, despite the concern I know exists among Opposition Members, pensioners had an increase of only 3 per cent. in the years of the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979.

The Budget has been hailed as a Budget for the elderly —*[Interruption.]*—a view endorsed by the director general of Help the Aged in a recent letter, which I will quote for the benefit of Opposition Members. He wrote:

"I thought you would appreciate hearing how much we applaud the actions you have taken in your Budget to help pensioners. We are especially pleased at the abolition of the age related earnings rule and are grateful too for the changes you have made in VAT regulations in connection with charities. This will be of considerable assistance to us in our efforts to help elderly people, both in this country and overseas."

That letter was from Mr. John Mayo—*[Interruption.]*—and I read the whole of the letter.

This Bill contains one other measure to help the elderly. Clauses 51 to 54 will give tax relief for private medical insurance premiums for the over-60s. Unlike Opposition Members, I do not want to endow this measure with a false importance. It accounts for just 1 per cent. of the tax reductions announced in the Budget. It addresses a very real problem, and I make no apology for the measure, for I fully support it.

In recent years, employers' health insurance schemes have expanded rapidly, and I welcome that. It is attractive to see independence and choice increasing, and I regret that Opposition Members are hostile to that. It is largely due to such schemes that some 50 per cent. more people are covered by medical insurance schemes today than in 1980. But membership of these schemes usually ends on retirement. People are then faced with a double increase in costs: not only do their employers cease to pay their premiums, but the premiums tend to rise at precisely the moment when people's incomes fall.

We have had a large number of representations over the years from people caught in this trap who did not think it was fair that they should suffer this double penalty. I agree with them, and the relief is designed to deal with that specific problem. It also encourages the overall provision of health care and investment in it, and thus eases the demands in that fashion on the NHS.

Indeed, in a curious way, the greater the take-up of this relief, the more that effect will be apparent. In particular, pressure on waiting lists will be eased, which will benefit all of us who continue to depend overwhelmingly on the NHS for medical treatment. Even non-taxpayers will benefit because they, too, will pay their premiums net of tax relief.

The medical insurance industry has begun to introduce policies which are aimed at those who cannot afford, or do not want to take out, more expensive cover. Some of the policies are intended specifically for people in retirement, and I welcome that extension of choice for them.

Although this measure is important, it needs to be seen in perspective. Our public expenditure plans mean that, overall, the NHS will have an extra £2,500 million in 1989-90, and a further £2,500 million in 1990-91—a total of £5 billion—before resources for it are reconsidered in subsequent public expenditure rounds. The cost of tax relief is nothing in 1989-90 and £40 million in 1990-91—less than 2 per cent. of the increase in planned spending on the NHS. I must say to the Opposition in all charity that if they have chosen to target their attack on the Budget on this measure, it serves simply to underline how little they find to criticise both in the Budget and the Bill.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Can the Chief Secretary tell the House why the Secretary of State for Health and the Minister of State for Health welcomed the measure in lukewarm fashion, saying that, at best, it was an interesting detail in the Bill, and, at worst, would damage attempts to sell the White Paper on health about which the Government are struggling to convince the country?

Mr. Major: It is within my knowledge that both my right hon. and learned Friend and my hon. and learned Friend strongly support this measure. There is no doubt about that.

A dominant feature of the Bill is the improvement of the taxation of savings. It contains a series of measures to increase and deepen the ownership of shares, especially by employees and smaller investors. In the post-war period up to 1979, there was one clear trend in the composition of personal savings and that was the dramatic decline in direct share ownership. In 1957, shares and unit trusts accounted for around 20 per cent. of personal sector wealth. By 1979, their proportion had fallen to 8 per cent. That decline had nothing to do with the pre-tax return on equities because, historically, they have tended to out-perform other savings instruments. But it had a great deal to do with the post-tax return that investors received on their investments.

In contrast to saving through large tax relieved institutions, such as occupational pension schemes, direct equity investment subjected the saver to a range of punitive taxes. A top rate of tax of 83 per cent., combined with an investment income surcharge of 15 per cent.,

[Mr. Major]

meant that direct investors in equities could receive as little as 2p in the pound of dividend income. On top of that, they were taxed not only on real capital gains, which I am afraid were few and far between from 1974 to 1979, but also on inflationary gains, which were in considerably more plentiful supply. If the investor wanted to hand on his shares to his children, he was subject to yet another confiscatory tax in the form of capital transfer tax, where rates could be as high as 75 per cent. It is hardly surprising that direct share ownership went out of fashion in the 1970s; the only surprising thing is that it survived at all. Since 1979, my right hon. Friend and his predecessor have given share ownership a dramatic boost.

The trend has changed—I hope irreversibly. Shares and unit trusts now account for a growing share of personal wealth. Moreover, share ownership has widened dramatically. There are now 9 million shareholders. That represents 20 per cent. of the adult population, compared to only 7 per cent. in 1979. That has come about partly through a programme of privatisation which has proved immensely successful and which will continue in this Parliament and the next. But even more important for the longer term has been the creation of a more sensible tax system. Now that no tax rate is higher than 40 per cent., investing in shares is again a worthwhile proposition.

We believe that it is right to go further to promote private saving through equity investment. Direct share ownership must be allowed to compete with institutional saving. That is why my right hon. Friend introduced personal equity plans in 1986 and further improved them in the Budget. The increase in the overall investment limit from £3,000 to £4,800 and in the unit trust and investment trust limit from at best £750 to £2,400 will give PEPs an additional impetus. Unit and investment trusts allow investors to spread risk and are a good introduction to equity investment for the small saver. Along with the important PEP deregulation measures announced by my right hon. Friend, the changes have been widely welcomed. More plan managers are setting up plans and a number of new products are being marketed. As the chairman of the Unit Trust Association has said:

"PEPs should now be the major success that for investors they deserve to be."

We all look forward to that.

Employee share schemes are specifically designed to encourage direct share ownership by workers in their own companies. As such, I know that such schemes have supporters in each and every part of the House. They have the particular advantage of giving employees a direct stake in the company that they work for, and have been an important factor in breaking down the "them and us" mentality which pervaded British industrial relations, resulting in great damage, in the 1960s and 1970s. That mentality is going, and good riddance to it. The sooner it is gone, the better. The House will know of the success of all-employee share schemes, 1,600 of which have been approved to date against only 30 in 1979. Clauses 59 to 62 are designed to give them added impetus by increasing the limits for relief and relaxing the material interest rules.

Employee share ownership plans, known generically as ESOPs, provide an alternative means of encouraging employee ownership. Clauses 64 to 71 and schedule 5 provide a statutory basis for tax relief for company contributions to those plans. For some companies they offer more flexibility than normal all-employee share schemes. The point is that ESOP trusts can borrow to acquire shares rather than relying entirely on funds provided by the company. That enables a substantial number of shares to be held in trust for longer-term distribution to employees. Those clauses ensure that payments by a company to an ESOP trust, set up to acquire and distribute shares to its employees, will qualify for corporation tax relief, provided that certain qualifying conditions are met.

The most important of those conditions is that the shares must be distributed to employees within a maximum of seven years of their acquisition by the trust, and on an all-employee, similar terms, basis. ESOPs have a number of enthusiastic supporters on both sides of the House, and I am sure that those clauses will be welcomed. As the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said on Second Reading of the Finance Bill three years ago:

"I wish to make it clear that I support genuine extensions of share ownership schemes which enable and encourage employees to acquire stakes in their companies. The schemes that I want would carry voting rights proper to share ownership, and would be available to all company employees".—[*Official Report*, 29 April 1986; Vol. 96, c. 819.]

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will use his voting rights to support this measure because I agree with what he said three years ago and it is contained in this Bill.

The changes to the taxation of pension schemes set out in clauses 72 to 74 complement the wider share ownership measures. They will increase pensions choice and encourage greater personal responsibility for pension provision. They will also deregulate an area of savings which has become excessively and undesirably circumscribed by Inland Revenue rules.

The Government's record on improving private pension provision has been substantial over recent years. We have introduced personal pensions and free-standing additional voluntary contributions. We have made it easier for employees to contract out of the state scheme if they wish to do so, and we have improved the rights of scheme members, in particular those of early leavers.

Those clauses build on that record. The rules for additional voluntary contributions, or AVCs, will be greatly simplified, reducing the administrative burden on employers' schemes; and the anomaly whereby successful investment performance of the AVC led to a reduction in the employee's occupational pension will be ended. In future, excess AVC funds will be returned to the employee subject only to a special tax charge.

Ending the link between Inland Revenue limits and the maximum pension payable by employers also makes the pensions regime more flexible. Employees and employers will now be free to negotiate whatever pension package they jointly think is appropriate. Inland Revenue rules will no longer constrain the size of the pension, only the extent of the tax relief.

The cap on tax privileged pension benefits completes the changes begun by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in 1987. Based on earnings of £60,000, the cap has been pitched at a generous level. It will still be possible to receive a privileged pension of £40,000 a year, or, where benefits are commuted, a maximum tax-free lump sum of £90,000. Moreover, the limit will be indexed annually to prices. The transitional arrangements are equally generous. Only new

schemes and new members of the existing schemes will be subject to the cap on benefits. Most ordinary scheme members will simply not be affected.

I believe that a cap is necessary. Although we are committed to widening private pension provision, that should not be at an ever-increasing cost to the majority of taxpayers who do not receive such large pensions themselves. There is a limit beyond which tax-privileged saving is unfair and crowds out other ordinary saving. Other tax reliefs are subject to monetary limits, and it is time the tax relief for pensions was put on a similar basis.

These changes have also provided an opportunity to redress the balance between occupational and personal pension schemes. Many members of personal pension schemes start contributing late in life, for reasons well understood in the House. They have no access to the accelerated accrual available in the best final salary schemes, and often have lower pensions in retirement as a result. Although tax-relieved contributions to personal pension schemes will be subject to an annual cash limit, we also propose that the limit on contributions be raised as a percentage of earnings for those aged 36 and over.

To take the example of someone aged 56, under the old rules he received relief on contributions up to 22·5 per cent. of his earnings; under the new rules he will receive relief up to 35 per cent. of his earnings. This change will give a further boost to personal pensions and will be of special value to those who, in their earlier working life, need to plough back every penny available into building up their business. On Budget day, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor reported that more than 1 million people had taken out personal pensions by the end of 1988. I am pleased to tell the House that that number has risen to 1·5 million.

The Bill also contains important measures for business. In his first Budget my right hon. Friend introduced a major reform and simplification of corporation tax which enabled the main corporation tax rate to be reduced to 35 per cent., one of the lowest in the industrial world. That low rate, together with the removal of the old bias against employment inherent in the old system, has made a significant contribution to rapid economic growth, employment growth and the high investment that we have seen in recent years.

Of no less importance was the reduction in the small company corporation tax rate from 42 per cent. in 1978-79 to 25 per cent. today. It is now right to extend the benefits of that rate to more companies. Clause 33 therefore raises the profit limit by 50 per cent., far more than was required to keep pace with inflation. That measure will enable firms to make profits of up to £750,000 a year before paying the average rate of 35 per cent.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In this and in other Budgets in recent years, many in the Government would argue that they have given large sums of money through taxation relief to the top salaried people. The last set of figures shows that the salaries of company directors have increased by 26 per cent. Does the right hon. Gentleman take the view that those company directors who have been fed pretty well by the Government in the past few years are perhaps biting the hand that feeds them? What has the right hon. Gentleman to say about the 26 per cent. increase when low-paid workers are being packed off with increases of 4, 5 or 6 per cent.?

Mr. Major: We have made significant changes in taxation affecting people at all levels of income and not just those on high incomes. The basic rate of taxation, which affects all the 20-odd million people at work, has been reduced from 33 per cent. to 25 per cent. The hon. Gentleman will know—perhaps in view of what he has just said he will support it—that it remains our objective to reduce that as soon as we prudently can from 25 per cent. to 20 per cent. I am pleased that he thinks that that is a desirable objective. I hope that he carries the support of his colleagues.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the very people who have been calling for wage restraint from the workers have seen their standard of living rise, after tax, by 26 per cent. in the last year? Is he aware that, according to the British Institute of Management, the standard of living of senior directors has risen by 47 per cent. in a year and that, according to another study, the standard of living of those on unearned income has risen by 87 per cent. in one year alone? Will he condemn those rises?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that payments to directors of companies are not a matter specifically for the Government. Taxation rates are legitimately a matter for the Government to determine. Incomes are not directly under the control of the Government. I have no intention of responding in detail and directly at the Dispatch Box on each of those points.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that that little exchange shows with the greatest possible clarity the difference between the Opposition and we on this side of the House on taxation? Opposition Members see taxation as a fine on success regardless of whether it brings more money to the Treasury. The decrease in taxation rates on higher levels of income has increased the amount of money brought into the Treasury, which is then available for redistribution to those on lower incomes.

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is entirely correct in what he says about the tax yield. It is equally true to say that under the management and guidance of the people criticised by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) there has been a dramatic increase in investment, employment, the profitability of companies and the general well-being of people in this country. We see tax changes, at both the upper and the lower level, as supply-side measures and they have proved to be so over recent years.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): What my constituents in Oldham cannot understand is that, in the midst of this success story which the Minister has just told us about, last year, when they went on holiday to Spain, they got 202 pesetas for their pound, while this year they are getting only 192·5 pesetas. Does that reflect a strengthening of our economy?

Mr. Major: What the hon. Gentleman misses out of that interesting illustration is how many more of his constituents have been able over the past 10 years to afford to go abroad as a result of the policies of this Government.

Returning to the necessary, if perhaps esoteric, area of small companies corporation tax from which I was unruly ripped, I was about——

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Untimely.

Mr. Major: I am grateful for that Shakespearian memory. "Untimely ripped" is the correct quotation from "Macbeth", appropriately coming to me from a Scottish Member.

The measure in clause 33 will enable firms to make profits, as I reminded the House a few moments ago, of up to £750,000 before paying an average rate of 35 per cent. What is relevant about this is that it strengthens once again Britain's claim to have the most favourable tax regime in Europe for small companies and it has been very widely welcomed by business men and managers, who, as the director general of the British Institute of Management wisely said—and the Opposition should listen to this—

"prefer stability and good sense to histrionics."

How wise the director general was.

A substantial chunk of the Bill will complete the reform of the administrative framework for the main taxes, which began with the setting up of the Keith committee in 1980. Clauses 138 to 165 simplify and update the system of interest and penalties for tax offences and revise the information powers of the Revenue. They will help to ensure that the operation of the tax system is effective and efficient, while at the same time remaining fair and just. They are the product of an almost unprecedented degree of consultation on tax matters and have been widely welcomed in responses as achieving a proper balance between the rights and obligations of the taxpayer and between the powers of the Revenue and safeguards for the citizen.

Clauses 17 to 21 implement last June's judgment of the European Court on VAT zero rating. As my right hon. Friend said in his Budget statement, we have made every effort to minimise the unwelcome burden of tax that we have been obliged to impose on businesses and, more especially, charities. Again, we have consulted widely with those who will be affected; indeed, consultation began on a contingency basis even before the judgment was given. I am glad to say that my right hon. Friend was able to meet their main proposals for minimising the judgment's impact. We have delayed implementation for as long as is possible and the transitional arrangements are said to be and are generous.

One of our main concerns has been the effect of the judgment on charities. We have managed to ensure that for their basic non-business activities charities will continue to benefit from zero-rated construction services and fuel and power. Homes for children, the elderly and the disabled will continue to be zero rated. In addition, charities will be relieved from VAT on fund-raising events, classified advertising and sterilising equipment for medical use. These measures have met with the approval of many charities. As a Royal National Lifeboat Institution spokesman put it:

"We stage all sorts of fund-raising events where the admission charge carries VAT. It will mean a good few thousand saved for our coffers."

I certainly hope so.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Gentleman has been speaking for more than half an hour in dealing with the details of the Finance Bill much more fully than is normal on Second Reading. When will he turn to the critical report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee?

Mr. Major: The right hon. Gentleman is entirely correct in saying that I have been speaking for half an hour, but a considerable part of that time has been taken up by interventions. He says that I am dealing in detail with the Finance Bill. That is what we are discussing, and it is a courtesy to the House to deal with what we are discussing.

There are a number of other provisions in the Bill which will benefit charities. Clause 25 exempts from car tax vehicles leased to the disabled. This will reduce the cost of each car by £400 and it has been widely welcomed. I quote from the deputy chairman of Motability:

"Without doubt this measure will help to enhance mobility for disabled people, especially those with very limited resources."

As a former Minister of State for the disabled, this gives me particular pleasure.

The best way to help charities is to encourage people to contribute to them. In recent years in budgetary measures we have improved relief for charitable covenants, introduced relief for companies making one-off donations and, most recently, introduced relief for payroll giving.

The response has been encouraging. Between 1978-79 and 1987-88 covenanted giving to charities grew by 140 per cent. in real terms. Payroll giving has also grown steadily since its introduction in 1987. There are now over 3,600 schemes in operation covering 100,000 participants. Clause 55 gives a further encouragement to this form of charitable giving by doubling the limit for relief. I am delighted that this measure has met with considerable approval among charities. It also shows that tax reductions and growing net incomes have increased charitable giving and that we are by no means the selfish and materialistic society that the Opposition sometimes claim.

Finally, and perversely, I would like to draw Members' attention to clause 1. This contains the measures designed to promote unleaded petrol, which have met with universal approval.

Despite the growing availability of unleaded petrol, its lower price and clear environmental benefits, at the time of the Budget it still accounted for only around 5 per cent. of petrol sales. That was, frankly, extremely disappointing and it prompted my right hon. Friend to try a new approach. He made it clear that he expected the full tax reduction of 3·6p a gallon on unleaded to be passed on to consumers. This has happened. The price differential at the pumps between four-star and unleaded is now generally between 9p and 10p per gallon compared with 6p before the Budget. Furthermore, the increase in duty on two and three-star has raised prices to at least the level of four-star, leading to a reduction in the market for these two grades and creating more capacity for unleaded.

All the signs are that those changes are having the desired effect. The proportion of garages now selling unleaded petrol is close to 40 per cent. and is expected to top 50 per cent. by mid year. I hope and expect that that will increase still further. The onus is now firmly on individual motorists—be they two, three or four-star users—to ensure that, where they can, they switch soon to the cleaner fuel. I hope that they will do that.

The Bill contains a series of measures to improve the taxation of savings, to widen share ownership, and to help small businesses. It will simplify and modernise the administration of the tax system. It underpins the continued strength of our public finances, takes forward

our programme of tax reform, and improves the supply performance of the economy. It is a Bill well worthy of support, and I commend it to the House.

5 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): We welcome some of the measures contained in the Finance Bill as explained in what I suppose the press may call a less than robust defence of the Chancellor's policies by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

We welcome and will support the improvement in the age addition for pensioners and the change in the earnings rule for pensioners. We welcome and will support the differential in unleaded petrol, although many of us believe that the Chancellor could have gone further in that. We welcome and will support, with regard to the Chancellor and the Bill, the changes in the management of the Inland Revenue recommended by the Keith committee. Although we do not believe that they go far enough, we will welcome the changes in national insurance set out in the Social Security Bill.

However, we cannot support a Finance Bill, an economic strategy and a Budget which has done little for the vast majority of people throughout the country and which will do nothing to tackle the underlying weaknesses of the British economy.

Ten days ago inflation crept up to 7·9 per cent. when at this time last year it was half as much at 3·9 per cent. Tomorrow, even if the best hopes of the Chancellor are realised, we will still be running the worst trade deficit in our history and certainly a worse trade debt than our European competitors.

Ten months after interest rates began rising, home owners could be excused for hoping that it was time that they came down. However, once again they fear that interest rates are in danger of rising, even when interest rates are 5 per cent. in Japan, 6·5 per cent. in Germany, 10 per cent. in America, but are already 13 per cent. in Britain.

Interest rates have been at 13 per cent. for five months and they have been above 10 per cent for nine months. Inflation has been rising for 13 months in a row. The balance of payments deficit has been worsening for just about all the time that this Chancellor has been in office. As a result of the need to finance that deficit, the high interest rates have meant that 9 million mortgage holders have had to pay on average an extra £40 a month in mortgage repayments.

In the face of all that, people will want to know why, after 10 years of this Government, after 10 years of North sea oil revenues when the Government have received £76 billion in tax returns from the North sea, we are going to end this decade with the highest inflation, the highest interest rates and the worst trade deficit of our major competitors. Is it not therefore surprising that the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, whose report I will mention even if the Chief Secretary to the Treasury would not, said that the Chancellor is walking on a tightrope? Is it not also surprising that almost all the expert evidence which the Committee has been able to assemble has been critical of the Chancellor's policies? I commend the Chairman and his Committee for doing such a thorough job in examining the economy.

Is it surprising that at least one Cabinet Minister has deigned to come above board and criticise the full thrust of the Chancellor's policies when referring to the Chancellor's high interest rate strategy and the impossibility of one simplistic economic dogma solving a nation's economic problems? The Secretary of State for Wales called for regional and industrial investment and expressed his fears about what is happening in the economy at the moment. He said:

> "Capitalism could be severely damaged if we continue a system where currency exchange rates fast fluctuate as a result of the decisions not of Governments or of major industrialists but of those who command the vast flows of hot money circulating throughout the world."

The Chancellor has brought us to that as a result of his policies.

Perhaps the most astonishing criticism among the growing criticisms of the Chancellor was that made in a recent speech by the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, Mr. John Banham—*[Interruption.]* The Chancellor may laugh at Mr. Banham, but Mr. Banham may read the report of our debate in *Hansard*.

Mr. Banham compared Britain in the 1980s, not, as the Chancellor does, with Japan in the 1980s, but with Britain in the 1930s. He said that the Chancellor's policies reminded him of Churchill's phrase about the 1930s—the "locust years." He questioned whether the "locust years" was a term which could be applied to the 1980s. He questioned also whether we are in danger of making the same terrible mistakes today and being guilty of the same short-termism for which we have rightly criticised Chamberlain and Baldwin.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Did the hon. Gentleman also notice that John Banham is quoted in the CBI's house journal as saying that this Budget is a

> "cautious responsible budget with some useful measures for business which will help smaller companies in particular."?

How is that consistent with the slashing attack which he has recently given?

Mr. Brown: Mr. Banham was referring to the kind of measures which we have welcomed. Mr. Banham, in his speech of 16 March, criticised the Government for bringing us to a position where the 1980s may be the "locust years."

Mr. Banham has been even more critical of the Government's record on inflation. He blamed the Government for water and electricity price rises as being the single most important factor in pushing up inflation. He said that the Government are creating inflation in a way which will postpone vital investment which could deal with the underlying causes of inflation. The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) cannot look for much comfort in Mr. Banham's comments. He should reflect on the remarks by the CBI. He should also consider the results of surveys like that carried out in Scotland which showed that investment intentions are now the worst for 18 months and that there are worries that manufacturing employment may fall.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No, I want to proceed.

We have the highest interest rates of our competitors, the highest inflation rate and the worst trade deficit in our history. I believe it was the Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee who first said in November that

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the jury was out on the Chancellor. That was almost six months ago. Three weks ago the Governor of the Bank of England said that the jury was still out.

The jury has been out for a long time now. It has been out so long that the Chancellor has had the benefit of one of the longest trials in recent experience and undoubtedly, for the nation, one of the most expensive. It is about time that the jury returned. Is the verdict not now overdue? Perhaps the verdict on the Chancellor's performamce will be delivered in the expected Cabinet reshuffle. Perhaps the best that he can hope for is leniency and that he may get off with a suspended sentence or probation under the personal supervision of Sir Alan Walters, who is due to provide what he calls his "independent advice" on 1 May.

Inflation is twice what it was a year ago and twice what it was when the Chancellor took office and pledged to eliminate it. It is 7·9 per cent. in Britain, 1·4 per cent. in Japan and 2·6 per cent. in Germany. Despite the freezing of excise duties, which will prevent the rate rising by 0·5 per cent., the inflation figures have yet to show the nine price rises that came in the first weeks of April, for most of which the Chancellor was directly responsible. Those include the 7 per cent. rise in electricity, 3 per cent. rise in gas, 10 per cent. to 30 per cent. rise in water, rate and rents, prescription charge rises, television licence fee rises, the new health charges and the petrol price rises, about which the Chancellor has been strangely silent when faced with the behaviour of oil companies as they push up petrol prices.

Perhaps the Chief Secretary regrets saying in the Second Reading debate last year:

"What is vital, and unusual for post-war recoveries . . . is that this . . . sustained growth in the economy has been achieved without a resurgence of inflation."—[*Official Report*, 26 April 1988; Vol. 132, col. 215.]

The tragedy is that the inflation that he did not forecast is the inflation that he and his Ministers caused. Last July——

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): The hon. Gentleman paints a bleak picture of the British economy. If, for the sake of argument, one accepts his analysis, will not the position grow even worse than he describes it if higher-than-inflation wage settlements are reached? What would the hon. Gentleman advise those unions seeking higher-than-inflation wage settlements?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is joining me in criticising the 26 per cent. post-tax rises for directors and the 47 per cent. rises to senior directors. I shall tell the hon. Gentleman how the Chancellor could begin to tackle inflation. He could postpone the electricity and water price rises, imposed for one purpose only—to fatten up the industries for privatisation. When the hon. Gentleman looks at the figures, I think that he will agree with me and others that the Government have been responsible for most of the inflation from which we now suffer.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): The hon. Gentleman mentioned rate rises. Does he agree that the majority of rate rises have been due to Labour councils?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman shows a strange misunderstanding of what has been happening to central Government expenditure in relation to local authorities. Over the past 10 years the Government have not only cut their contribution but cut their proportionate contribution to local authorities so that rates have been forced up for those local authorities trying to maintain services. In Scotland, we now have the final result—the poll tax, which is basically a flat rate charge, and is being imposed against the wishes of the vast majority of people in Scotland.

Our case against the Chancellor and the Government is not merely that we have the highest inflation and interest rates, and the worst trade deficit, or that we have returned to stop-go economics even before North sea oil has run out. It is not only, although this is bad enough, that the Chancellor's solution to the problem—creating high interest rates and by discouraging investment—is part of the problem rather than the solution. Our case against the Chancellor is more than that. It is that, having made all these mistakes by engineering a consumer boom that was not properly backed up by adequate investment, he has no greater desire in life than to keep his job and to repeat them at a later stage.

Mr. Yeo *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way.

Having engineered a consumer boom that was preceded by high interest rates, and having used for tax cuts resources that should have been used for investment, the Chancellor intends to engineer another pre-election boom, preceded by the present high interest rates, which are so damaging to investment. He will use the Budget surplus not for investment in our future, but for tax cuts. That is the mistake that the Chancellor makes when planning the long-term future of the economy. The result is——

Mr. Yeo *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Brown: The result is that we end the 1980s in the astonishing position in which household consumption has increased by 30 per cent. during the past 10 years, but industrial production has increased by only 10·5 per cent. The obvious result is that imports have had to increase by 50 per cent., giving the trade deficit that is causing all the problems that the Chancellor will sooner or later have to face.

Even more astonishing is the fact that in the past 10 years manufacturing production has risen by only 8 per cent., while manufacturing imports have risen by about 100 per cent. That is the position to which the Chancellor's policies have brought us. The problems are due to the neglect of investment over a long period, the inability to prepare our industry for the future. We face the 1990s and the harsher marketplace of 1992 with the worst trade deficit in our history and a Chancellor who has no policy for sorting it out.

Our complaint against the Chancellor does not stop there. Even when he has a Budget which he claims will help the low paid, he ends up, as usual, helping the higher paid. National insurance changes mean that there is nothing for anyone earning less than £43 a week. There are about two million people in that position. There is £1·50 less in some cases, far less than £1·50 a week for those earning less than £115 a week. None of that will be paid until October, whereas the Chancellor was very keen to give his top-rate tax cuts of last April in April. The figures show that those at the top benefit far more than those at the bottom.

The Budget was not one for low income Britain, but one which compounds last year's errors by giving most to upper income Britain. It does not do anything for people faced with high mortgage repayments, many of whom as a result of building society decisions saw their mortgage rates rise on April 1, on the annual basis used by companies such as the Halifax building society.

In a lecture, the Governor of the Bank of England said that it was unlikely that last year's experience with mortgage arrears would be sustained. He said that building societies were already reporting an increase in short-term arrears and that the full impact of higher mortgage rates was yet to be felt. Last year, for the basic rate taxpayers, those who are home owners, tax cuts amounted to about £1·5 billion in a full year, but the mortgage rises for that period would be about £4·5 billion. For 118 out of the 120 months of the Chancellor's period in office, mortgage rates have been above 10 per cent. As we work out the figures, we realise that for the vast majority of home owners the tax cuts have already been clawed back by the mortgage rises and the vast majority of people are already worse off and suffering a deterioration in their standard of living as a result.

What do the Government say about this? Far from helping home owners or the majority of pensioners—although we welcome the changes in the earnings rule and age addition—and far from unfreezing child benefit, about which there was a debate last night in which the Government took a hard line, the Finance Bill gives far more to those who have than to the majority of people who have not. It seems that the Chancellor is not content with the £2 billion that he gave to the top 1 per cent. in last year's Finance Bill, the £26 billion that he has given over 10 years, the £10,000 each that those in the top 1 per cent. have received each year, or the £100,000 that he has given cumulatively in tax cuts to the typical person who falls within the top 1 per cent.

The Finance Bill contains a series of changes which can only be said to raise the incomes of those who are already rich, without doing anything for those on low incomes. The changes in inheritance tax will cost £35 million but will cover only 39,000 taxpayers. There are changes in capital gains tax, from which any personal possession that is sold off and is worth up to £6,000 is exempt. The Government have closed the obvious and glaring loophole in closed company tax relief in relation to the business expansion scheme, but have not made the change retrospective although they have been aware of the abuse for some time. They have not dealt with the fundamental flaws of the business expansion scheme, which provides rented housing at a far greater cost than if local authorities or housing associations were given the same money to build.

We shall support the Government's attempts to implement the recommendationss of the Keith committee. We regret that they have not faced up to a number of its recommendations, such as the power of entry and inspection of business records in respect of transfer pricing. We might have expected them to act on the taxation of non-residents as well, especially after the Treasury paper issued last summer which said that the current loopholes

"encourage the setting up of arrangements overseas which can be more or less artificial."

There is nothing of substance in the Bill to deal with that abuse, and we shall press the point in Committee.

What justification have the Government for failing to sign the OECD agreement on an international campaign to clamp down on tax evasion?

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): Can the hon. Gentleman name any country that has signed?

Mr. Brown: A number of countries are very concerned that the agreement be signed. Why has Britain refused to sign it? Why have the Government given us the explanation that they are doing quite enough about tax evasion already, when all the available evidence suggests that massive evasion on an international scale is taking place and is not being properly dealt with, and that international agreements are required for it to be so dealt with? When that matter is raised in Committee, I believe that the Economic Secretary will be persuaded of the need for further action.

Another proposal that the Chief Secretary said had achieved a false importance in debates on the Budget and the Finance Bill is the proposal for private medical insurance. We shall, of course, discuss that at length later, as we are entirely opposed to the relevant clause. Last week the Treasury issued an explanatory memorandum, although the regulations which are vital to an understanding of how the scheme will work have yet to be issued in full. The Treasury said that the test for private medical insurance was that the £40 million or more—we believe that it is more—would

"relieve pressure on the National Health Service".

I will tell the Minister the best way of relieving pressure on the National Health Service—give the money to the National Health Service. Is it not clear that the best way of providing health care for anyone is to provide it for everyone? That is the proper way in which to use the available resources.

We shall debate all these matters in Committee, both upstairs and on the Floor of the House. It is interesting to note, however, that this Finance Bill ends a 10-year period under the present Government in which Ministers have claimed that there has been an economic miracle and an industrial resurgence, and that Britain has been transformed by their policies. The Chief Secretary started to say that earlier this afternoon.

What sort of economic miracle is this? Despite all our revenues, the growth rate of the British economy has been only 2 per cent. a year in the 10 years since 1979, half that of Japan. It has been 2·5 per cent. in Italy, 2·5 per cent. in the OECD countries as a whole, 2·7 per cent. in America and 4 per cent. in Japan. What sort of economic miracle is it when manufacturing output has grown by 1 per cent. a year in Germany, by 1·5 per cent. a year in Italy, by 2·5 per cent. a year in America, by 4 per cent. a year in Japan and by 2·2 per cent. a year in the OECD countries, but by only 0·8 per cent. a year in the country that the Chancellor claims is hosting an economic miracle? What sort of miracle is it when exports have increased by 3 per cent. in Italy, by 4 per cent. in Germany, by 5 per cent. in America and by 7 per cent. in Japan, but by only 2·8 per cent. in Britain?

On all those indicators, Britain is not leading the world; it is very near the bottom of the table—and the reason is that the policies of the Chancellor and his predecessors have been wrong.

Yesterday the Government voted to freeze child benefit for 7 million mothers and 12 million children. In the past

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few weeks, half a million pensioners and others on benefit nave been denied any uprating at all. This month, destitute teenagers who have already lost their unemployment benefit are now losing many of their housing benefits. Pensioners faced with price rises that are way above their pension rises are seeing their living standards fall.

On top of that, this month has brought the new health charges. We have already experienced housing benefit cuts, and, in Scotland, the imposition of the poll tax. Yet at the same time—as the British Institute of Management confirmed yesterday, and as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—huge windfall bonuses have been paid to people who are already rich as a result of tax changes made last year which the Government have been prepared to maintain this year.

For directors the average pay rise, with the tax cut included, has been 26 per cent. According to the survey, the increase for those in the senior directors' grade has been 47 per cent. For those with unearned income—the top 1 per cent.—it has been 86 per cent. I can think of no occasion in this century when the living standards of pensioners and others on fixed benefits have fallen at the same time as there has been such a huge and disproportionate increase in the benefits of those at the very top.

In this Finance Bill, the Chancellor had a unique opportunity to correct last year's errors and to introduce a truly radical element into Tory Budget policy—fairness. By failing to apply that test the Bill compounds rather than corrects those errors, which is why we shall vote against it this evening.

5.26 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): On Second Reading of the Finance Bill, every Chief Secretary faces the dilemma of whether to be extraordinarily dull by going through every single clause or whether to be highly controversial. Given the experience of my right hon. Friend's predecessor, who tried the second course, I well understand why he thought it right this afternoon to take a more balanced approach.

None the less, my right hon. Friend did not resort entirely to going through the Bill from clause 1 to the end. He made a number of points at the beginning with which I certainly agree. He was right to stress that the Bill is of substantial importance to the elderly, and also to point out the extent to which the Government have succeeded in repaying the national debt, and the scope that that will provide in future years in relation to taxation or public expenditure on priority items.

I do not wish this afternoon to concentrate on the details of the Bill. Let me just say in passing, in reply to the points that my right hon. Friend stressed about investment in equities and shares, that it is important to strike a balance between them and more institutional forms of saving.

This is a mammoth Finance Bill, with 250 pages. The Select Committee on Procedure, which I chaired some years ago, considered whether we should have a separate tax Bill—perhaps in the autumn—which would be dealt with at a more leisurely pace than is necessary under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968. We must consider carefully whether it will be possible for any Standing Committee to give the Bill the attention that it needs if our financial legislation is to be properly scrutinised.

The report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service is based on evidence given to us by the Chancellor, the Governor of the Bank of England and officials. It is undoubtedly the case that the evidence we now get subjects the Chancellor, the governor and officials to far more intensive scrutiny than was ever the case. That is an advantage for this House when it comes to consider matters connected with this Bill.

The Select Committee report is unanimous. It brings out the various problems inevitably being faced at present. The report also draws attention to matters affecting the origin of the present financial situation. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) referred to the remarks made by Mr. Banham about the 1930s. We must be clear that many of the present problems are the direct result, as the Chief Secretary pointed out, of action taken by the Chancellor in conjunction with other Finance Ministers, with virtually unanimous support—with the exception of perhaps one of my hon. Friends—to prevent a world slump of the 1930s type after the stock exchange crash in autumn 1987. As we make it clear in paragraph 11 of the Select Committee report—and we quote the Chancellor and the governor—mistakes were made at that point in relation to monetary policy. In a way, we are now suffering a hangover from the stimulus which was given to the economy in 1987, for the reasons that I have explained. In that context, hon. Members must appreciate the point stressed by the Select Committee again and again, that the statistical basis on which the Government and, indeed, Parliament are taking decisions is seriously defective. I welcome the fact that an inquiry has been conducted and that the Government have responded, but the statistical situation must be improved, otherwise inevitably mistakes of the kind recorded in the Select Committee's report will be made.

It is also important to appreciate the speed with which the economy accelerated following the stimulus given to it. As the Select Committee's report points out, the Government and the House are now on a tightrope, with a real danger on either side. On the one hand, if the measures the Chancellor has taken on interest rates have a rapid and too dramatic effect the country could fall into recession. On the other hand, if those measures take too long to produce an effect, confidence in sterling will weaken, and the decline in the value of sterling will generate inflationary pressures. The essence of the problem, as the report makes clear, is essentially one of timing. The dilemma is that we do not know at what rate the increase in the interest rate will actually have effect. As the report makes clear, this situation is likely largely to affect those who have mortgages, having borrowed on an appreciation of house prices. Therefore, there is a lagged effect. It is important that the Chancellor should therefore seek to maintain the balance that he is presently achieving. He should take appropriate action as the occasion arises.

We need to ensure that we do not rush hastily into other measures that push the economy on one side or the other of the tightrope to which the Select Committee has drawn attention. In that context, what is clearly needed is significant evidence that a slowdown in the economy is taking place. In his evidence to the Committee, the Chancellor referred both to house prices and the extent of house purchase transactions. He also referred to the

indicator MO on the money supply. I hope that action will be taken to ensure that such evidence as we have on these matters is also improved.

It is also of grave concern that we are likely to suffer from the actions of foreign Governments. Against the background of international monetary co-ordination, which the Chancellor has played a prominent role in fostering, I hope that there will be some co-ordination. The hike in German interest rates last week was unfortunate. The response of the international community generally to that development seemed rational in the circumstances.

The Committee's report also brings out clearly the fact that, in addition to treating interest rates as its main instrument, the Government have taken appropriate action on the fiscal front. We are undoubtedly running a budget surplus of totally unprecedented size. My personal view is that it does not seem reasonable to argue that last year's Budget was too slack if we end up with an all-time budget surplus. However, the Committee's report brings out the fact that we are operating against a background in which consumers are being inundated with appeals to borrow more money. So last year's Budget created an air of confidence that had a greater effect on the economy than could easily have been predicted. I believe that the Chancellor's monetary measures are likely to have an effect. Labour Members have rightly pointed out that interest rates have been increased successively to a very high level. It is right and proper that we should maintain that position.

In many respects, we are in a dangerous position. The balance of payments situation certainly gives cause for concern. Unlike some members of the Select Committee, I do not believe that the solution to the present problems is to be found in a depreciation of the exchange rate. I believe that the Chancellor's attitude in this respect is correct. If we were to have a sterling depreciation when the economy is operating close to capacity, the danger would be that the inflationary pressures would become quite uncontrollable.

A policy of no depreciation of the currency combined with deflation will inevitably take a considerable time to have effect, and this is a cause for concern. The deflation in this case is against the background of very high profit levels, so that the resistance to wage settlements by the private sector is likely to be a rather lengthy process. Overall there are causes for concern, but I believe the Chancellor is right to say that the exchange rate should be maintained at the present level. None the less, he should take deflationary action to deal with the inflationary pressures and bring the economy back into equilibrium.

I believe that the stress the Chancellor is putting on the ability of capacity effect to improve the export side is likely to be an over-estimate. The Select Committee seeks to bring out this point. There are likely to be effects with regard to the import side of the equation.

Basically, I believe that we must hope that international events do not disturb the present equilibrium. We shall need to maintain the exchange rate and keep interest rates at a very high level for a considerable time. None the less, my hope is that it will be unnecessary to increase them further against the background I have just outlined.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *rose*——

Mr. Higgins: I will not give way. I was about to say that short speeches are in order.

I want to make one final point in a wider context about the Delors committee report. The argument has been put forward by Delors that we should progress from 1992 into a situation where we eventually end up with monetary and economic union. Once we have begun going down that path there is to be no turning back. I feel bound to say, in the context of a debate on Second Reading of a Finance Bill, that the whole basis of authority of this House has always rested on the control of money—the control of taxation on the one hand and of expenditure on the other. The ultimate aim sought to be achieved by the Delors committee report is one where there are constraints on the budgetary policies of national Governments. In that context the Chancellor is right to have responded as he has to the Delors committee report. The matter is of great importance. It does not mean that we should not proceed to 1992 and seek to make progress and, if need be, go along with some of the other proposals—for example, the exchange rate mechanism—at whatever may be an appropriate speed. But we should not commit ourselves to a course of action that is explicitly designed to take from this House the fundamental authority that it has in respect of money matters. I hope that my right hon. Friend will put that point clearly to his colleagues in the European Economic Community. I find it extraordinary that the French Prime Minister should attack us for going too slowly when we abolished exchange controls about 10 years ago, and when France still has a considerable way to go in that regard.

Finally, as the Treasury Select Committee report makes clear, as does the evidence from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the governor, we are in a difficult economic situation. I hope that as a result of the policies now being pursued we shall see our way out of the present difficulties, albeit that they are very considerable.

5.40 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): It is a pleasure to follow the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, who guides that Committee so well. There was an indication in his comments that we disagree on some matters. I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman about the need for a move towards economic and monetary union in Europe. The illusion that the House has autonomy and that the Government possess sovereignty over many economic matters is at the root of many of our difficulties. What sovereignty is there when a 0·5 per cent. rise in the Bundesbank's interest rate sends tremors through the whole of our system? We are very interdependent. However, it remains the case that a Select Committee whose members hold many different views as to what precisely should be done analysed the situation and arrived at common, shared conclusions on some of the weaknesses and dangers that exist. The Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot be as dismissive of that as he originally sought to be.

The Finance Bill is lengthy, but that is not a tribute to its gravity or radicalism. The Bill does not achieve any of the radical, tax-reforming changes that remain to be effected. I refer to proper integration of the tax and benefit systems, for example. The Bill does not even integrate properly the tax and national insurance systems. Instead, it turns aside from elements of normal taxation policy, such as indexation of excise duty on alcohol and tobacco.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

We all know why that was done—because the Chancellor was so terrified of what might otherwise happen to the retail prices index.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I, along with others, will seek to amend the Bill in a number of respects. We shall strongly oppose tax relief on health care, which the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said is not as important as has been widely suggested. It is like the housemaid's baby—just a little baby. But it is intended that that baby will grow. It is certainly the Prime Minister's intention that it will be the starting point of a much wider system of encouraging people to get out of the National Health Service and to provide for their health needs by private insurance. That is being done in the knowledge that that will be a wholly inadequate way of providing for the health care of many people, and one that will fatally damage the Health Service itself.

We shall seek also to correct other faults in the Bill. The Chief Secretary made mention of the clauses dealing with charities. I still believe that more can be done under the European ruling to ease the position of village halls, for example, without completely defying that ruling. I hope that the Government have not closed their minds to the charitable aspects and that they will be examined in more detail.

We want to close some of the loopholes in the business expansion scheme. One wonders whether anybody will use that scheme to invest in manufacturing while it is so heavily loaded towards property investment, which is protected from serious depreciation by the value of the property itself. The use of the business expansion scheme in manufacturing is no longer seriously attractive and it needs to be modified.

We want to consider also the matter of nursery care, where we believe there is scope for tax relief—particularly as we enter a period of potential labour shortage.

Most right hon. and hon. Members view this not as an occasion to debate Committee points but to examine the background to the Finance Bill and the Budget. Had the situation not changed so dramatically, we might have expected an announcement from the Dispatch Box as to the current state of the economic miracle. That is what the Government used to talk about, but there was nothing miraculous about the Chief Secretary's comments. The "Oxford English Dictionary" defines the word "miracle" as

> "A marvellous event exceeding the known powers of nature . . . an act . . . exhibiting control over the laws of nature, and serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or is specially favoured by God."

We now clearly see that control over the laws of nature is not within the grasp of the Prime Minister and that she is not a divine agent.

As was seen last year, too much money chasing too few goods produces classic inflation. High interest and high exchange rates increase the difficulty for industry in its efforts to improve exports and achieve the turn-around that the Chancellor requires. None of those laws of nature has been changed. It is time to examine the miracle.

We start with the Government's strong point, which is said to be productivity. That is where the Government say they have achieved the greatest transformation. The Government have a tendency to choose the base year for their statistics very carefully. In 1979, productivity fell by more than 2 per cent. Last year it increased by only 1 per cent. Average growth in productivity since 1979 is only 1·8 per cent., compared with 2·2 per cent. in the previous 20 years. The improvement in productivity has been nothing like as good as the Government suggest.

There have been certain improvements, but some of them are the painful results of a recession that the Government themselves brought about. Others are associated with the ending of restrictive practices and with changing much of the climate of wage bargaining. The situation is not all bad, and there have been some significant improvements. However, the end result is not a more competitive industry. Unit labour costs have not been reduced as a result of productivity gains, and British industry is still not sufficiently competitive. So the Government's productivity record, which is said to be their strongest point, is not really very good.

Inflation is the Government's highest priority, but the picture there is appalling. We have inflation of 7·9 per cent. under a Government who think that they have removed all the basic causes of inflation. The situation is bound to worsen. Wage inflation has seriously taken off. Average earnings last month rose 9·25 per cent., and the danger of a wages spiral is clear. Commodity prices internationally are strong, and the Government themselves are increasing public sector prices. Water charges, transport costs, electricity costs and many other increases are dictated by other Government policies. They are not the result of increases in costs to those industries but of the Government's desire to restructure the water industry, for example. Water industry chairmen—particularly those already in the private sector—are imposing increases of 20, 30 or even 40 per cent. on the basis that they are necessitated by Government changes rather than by cost increases. It is estimated that without North sea oil inflation would be 11 per cent. higher than it is. The Government rely on the benefits of North sea oil to hold at bay a very worrying situation.

The Government's high interest policy may have become a necessity because of their fear of what would happen to inflation if the exchange rate fell. It may not slow the economy enough, or may take so long to do so that the prescription will be worse than the cure. The monetarists within the Government face something of a crisis. Traditionally, they are both monetarists and free marketeers. That was all very well when one could attribute inflation to a high public sector deficit. Then, the monetarists could say, "We shall deal with that. It is in the public sector." But when monetary expansion occurs mainly in the private sector, it is difficult to sustain a monetarist policy and to apply remedies. The Government are frightened of applying remedies to monetary expansion in the private sector.

The Chancellor's fears are illustrated by the extent to which he concentrates on the instrument of high interest rates. We argue that Government policy should be more broadly based. We say that they should drop those public sector price increases that are dictated other than by inevitable cost increases and take steps to stop by persuasion the aggressive marketing of credit. Having advanced that view several times in debates, I have at last evoked some response from the Financial Secretary, who told the Finance Houses Association that its members' advertising gives the impression of "profligate and imprudent" lending. The Government are moving towards

what the Japanese call firm administrative guidance. Why not? Why should not the Government exert some pressure on banks and other lenders to improve the situation?

We have argued that the Government, as an obvious anti-inflationary discipline, should have already got Britain into the European monetary system, and we argue that there is still scope for improving the attractions of saving in order to reduce the rapid credit expansion in the private sector. There is scope for increasing saving. The Government themselves concede that what they have done on the PEP scheme, for example, is more likely to "deepen" than to "widen" share ownership. I quote the Chancellor's words. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury is so used to my pressing this argument that he must recognise that there is no real sign that the measures in the Budget will bring about a wide increase in savings.

In addition, the Government have scope to use investment in prudent, non-inflationary ways to tackle the trade deficit problem. Unless they do something like that, there is no sign that anything else will do so. The Government's prophecies about the trade deficit are really quite extraordinary. Having moved from a forecast of a £4 billion trade deficit, they now recognise that we will have a trade deficit of at least £14·5 billion. But they see it going down to £3 billion by 1991. That is the implication of the figures that they have given us. The assumption is that there will be a massive switch in capacity from the home market to exports. There is no evidence to suggest that anything like that is beginning to happen, or is likely to happen, at a time when world trade growth is forecast to slow down, and United Kingdom cost competitiveness is likely to slow down as well. Indeed, there is some danger that the United Kingdom now has a structural deficit, which cannot be changed unless other measures also are taken. It requires far more of a miracle than there has been any sign of so far to bring about that change in competitiveness.

The other star point of the Government's miracle is supposed to be the surplus—the ability to repay public sector debt on a considerable scale because of the budget surplus. But this surplus is derived, in very large measure, from asset sales. Certainly, half of it can quite clearly be attributed to asset sales. It cannot be sensible steadily to diminish our national public investment at such a rate, and on such a scale, when there are obvious needs that the public sector can meet. Maybe those needs are different from those that the public sector has traditionally met.

I would go some way with the Government in saying that there is, indeed, a logic in releasing resources trapped in earlier forms of public investment, and shifting them into other forms, and, indeed, arguing each case on its merits. But there is clearly an urgent need for investment in training, in transport, and in communications—in things that can help to make industry more competitive. The Government should be identifying the areas of difficulty—areas like skills shortages and transport costs arising from weakness in the transport system—and directing public investment into those areas.

Of course, one of the illogicalities of the present system, to which the Treasury Select Committee has pointed in previous years, is that we never consider these things at the same time. If there is any stronger reason for considering expenditure and revenue at the same time than suddenly finding a surplus far greater than the Government themselves predicted we would have, it is hard to find. When the Government find themselves with an immensely larger surplus, surely there is a case for considering again the expenditure decisions that were made at the time of the Autumn Statement.

Hon. Members of all parties have spent a lot of time over the years telling various groups of constituents that they are in favour of what those constituents suggest, that their ideas are very good, but that the nation cannot afford them. The situation now is that the nation could afford a number of things if—and only if—it could manage the economy in such a way as to ensure that the spending on those things was not inflationary and did not generate dangerous economic pressures. That is the challenge to the Chancellor, but it is a challenge that he is totally failing to meet, because he does not accept the case for public investment in those areas that could make industry more competitive.

The Treasury Select Committee report has helped to remove a lot of the flannel and waffle that have surrounded recent discussion on economic matters and has, I hope, dispelled some of the myths and fallacies. It has attributed quite a bit of blame to last year's Budget, but also to decisions that were taken last year in the aftermath of the stock market crash. To that extent, nearly all of us must accept some share of the blame, because the Chancellor had very few critics for his interest rate policy a year ago. But, having embarked on that policy of lower interest rates, he himself should have realised that to take measures which would give people the expectation that borrowing would be easier, and a very good thing for them, and at the same time to take measures that put a time limit on people rushing out to buy houses and get multiple tax relief on them, would be bound to exacerbate the situation. That is detailed and set out in the Treasury Select Committee's report, and the Chancellor cannot escape the blame for it.

I think that, for that and other reasons, the Chancellor now finds himself, in the Committee's words, "on a tightrope". But he is not alone on the tightrope; also on it are all those people who do not know how they are going to carry on paying their mortgages, and all those people who do not know whether they will still have a job if the only way in which the economy sorts itself out is by a slump. When they fall off the tightrope, it will hurt them a great deal more than it hurts the Chancellor. It is to those issues that the Chancellor must now address himself.

5.56 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): When I went canvassing in part of my constituency on Friday evening—it was an area that my agent had recommended because, he said, the Social and Liberal Democrats were putting up the strongest challenge there—it was with some trepidation. Recently my postbag has not been full of letters congratulating the Government on the excellence of their policies. I have received a lot of criticism and a lot of complaint. I know very well that, as we have been told during the course of this debate, all those who have mortgages, including, no doubt, many hon. Members, have had to put up with much higher monthly mortgage payments. That can never be popular.

I was, therefore, very pleasantly surprised to discover that support for the Government is holding up very well. I believe that the reason for that is well illustrated by this debate. Although the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on behalf of the Opposition was effective at the most superficial level, he

[Mr. Tim Smith]

told us absolutely nothing about the Labour party's alternative to the Government's policies. I believe, and I think that opinion polls show that the electorate believe, that if at present we do have some economic difficulties to cope with, it is the Conservative Government and their Treasury Ministers who are best equipped to cope with them.

In a sense, it would be a little unfair to direct that comment to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who has just spoken for the Social and Liberal Democrats, because he at least put forward a number of constructive alternatives to the Government's policies. However, I have to tell him that the people to whom I have spoken are not too enthusiastic about his party, simply because it cannot agree with the other party that is supposed to be in the centre—the SDP—about anything, and because two candidates are being put up, not just in the current by-election but all round the country in the forthcoming elections. The hon. Gentleman needs to think about that, but at least he did put forward some constructive proposals.

Yesterday, as I read the Treasury Select Committee's report on the Budget proposals, I felt—and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) will forgive me for saying this—that there was an element of using the benefit of hindsight about the way in which what had occurred was being looked at.

Mr. Higgins: We said that several times.

Mr. Smith: I think that the report says so, but the way in which it was portrayed in the press today was such that one would think that the Committee had been extremely critical of the Treasury's handling of policies. But anybody who listened to my right hon. Friend's speech just now will have noticed that he did not criticise the present exchange rate policy or the present interest rate policy. Although there is an element of trying to balance on the tightrope in respect of what is going on at the moment, he did not make any major criticism of the way in which the policy is being handled. Everybody needs to be a little modest, a little humble, about the present situation. As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has just said, there was a pretty good degree of consensus about all this just over a year ago, after black Monday. Then the concern was really that we would have a repeat of what had happened in the 1930s. We knew that if we were to make a mistake, the right mistake would be to have too lax a policy rather than a major recession on our hands. We just need to reflect a little on that as we find ourselves in the present situation. Naturally, everybody is frustrated. People want to see the effects of the present policy coming through.

We have been told that the jury has been out for an awfully long time, and people have asked whether it is not time that it came back with a verdict. Unfortunately, the verdict on these policies is that we shall have to be a little patient, because the policies will take time to work through. The danger is that we shall over-react. The Treasury should hold the line with a 13 per cent. interest rate. The policy of the last five months should be allowed to continue and to work itself through. It will eventually lead to a satisfactory outcome.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The hon. Gentleman urges us to wait and to allow the policy to work itself through. People in my inner London constituency who last year took on an average mortgage are now paying £133 a month more in mortgage interest repayments. Many of them cannot meet their basic domestic commitments. How long must my constituents wait for this policy to work itself through and how high is the hon. Gentleman prepared to see interest rates go?

Mr. Smith: I have every sympathy with the hon. Lady's constituents. Many hon. Members have had to face that problem. First-time buyers mortgaged themselves up to the hilt when interest rates were relatively low. It must be very painful for them at present, but I have had a mortgage for about 17 years and I know that it gets better. It will get better for the hon. Lady's constituents, but they will have to be patient. If experience is anything to go by, the proportion of their monthly income that people spend on mortgage interest repayments reduces. The fact that people took on such high mortgage commitments last year was a reflection—perhaps a misguided one as it turned out—of their confidence in the future. Had it been otherwise, they would not have made such a decision in the first place.

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): Does my hon. Friend not agree that the best advice that he can give to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) to pass on to her inner London constituents is that they should put their problem to their building society or to the institution from which they borrowed their money? They are likely to receive a very charitable and most understanding response. Their capital and mortgage interest repayments will probably be frozen; an accommodation will probably be reached over a short-term period.

Mr. Smith: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, who is an expert on these matters. Lending institutions of all kinds are always sympathetic. The loan will have been taken out over a long period. Lending institutions may well be prepared to consider such an accommodation as my hon. Friend suggests.

I share the concern of those who have complained about the length and complexity of the Finance Bill. It amounts to 250 pages. The House needs to reflect on how it will consider future tax legislation. It is 10 years or more since my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), who is now the Foreign Secretary but who at that time was the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, suggested that we should have a technical tax Bill. I understand why the Treasury does not relish that prospect. It is bad enough having to deal with one Finance Bill a year; to have another would perhaps be a bit much. It would not fit into the parliamentary timetable. However, it will not be easy adequately to consider all the clauses in this long Bill.

The Select Committee on Procedure—if that is the right Committee—should consider how the House ought to deal with tax legislation. We want it to be simplified. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary told us that this measure will simplify matters, but the net result will be a substantial addition to the quantity of tax legislation. I have come to the conclusion that the best and perhaps the only way to simplify tax legislation is to abolish whole taxes. We do not seem to be able to make progress in any other way.

The Red Book shows which taxes raise the largest proportion of revenue. Far and away the largest revenue raisers today are income tax, corporation tax and value added tax.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): And national insurance.

Mr. Smith: Yes, but national insurance is paid into a separate fund. The community charge will also raise a large proportion of total revenue.

At the other end of the scale, inheritance tax raises only £1·1 billion and capital gains tax raises only £2·1 billion. In an ideal world there would be no taxation. The only object of taxation is to raise revenue for spending. I believe that we should tackle some of the taxes that raise relatively small amounts of revenue and get rid of them, not just to simplify matters but because every tax that has ever been raised affects people's economic behaviour. Taxation changes make people change their economic behaviour. That is particularly true of capital taxes; they have a disproportionate effect on people's economic behaviour.

I am concerned about the capital gains tax rate. A 40 per cent. capital gains tax rate is too high. Such a high rate of tax deters people from investing. If someone were to say to me, "I have £1 million in cash that I should like to invest, so can you tell me what is the most tax-efficient way to invest it?" I should say to him, "The best thing to do is to buy the largest possible house that you can afford." It is no wonder that estate agents in London still have queues of people who want to buy houses in the home counties at £1 million or more. It is because it is tax-free.

If that person then said to me, "I've still got some cash over", I should feel bound to say to him, "You had better put your money into a business expansion scheme, because you will get up front income tax and capital gains tax relief." If he then said to me, "I should really like to invest in my own business—in a high-risk, high-tech business start-up", I should have to tell him that there was no tax relief up front for his investment and that if he were successful he would have to pay 40 per cent. capital gains tax as the price of his success. That seems to me to be a crazy sense of priorities.

Mr. Boswell: I am following my hon. Friend's argument with interest and some sympathy. Does he not agree that many hon. Members have received representations from their constituents about specific proposals in the Finance Bill that are connected with the treatment of settlements and discretionary trusts and about the possibility of reallocating the affairs of a taxpayer and the settlement of a will after a death? Are these not matters that we shall have to consider carefully, together with the point that my hon. Friend has made about the high level of capital gains tax that is now in force?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important point that we shall want to consider in detail in Committee.

Clauses 51 to 54 deal with tax relief for medical insurance. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said that in some ways the debate on the subject had been inflated out of all proportion. I have major reservations about the introduction of such a tax relief. I have read the submission of the Royal College of Nursing, which many hon. Members received today. I sympathise with the view that if £40 million is available, it would be better to spend it on the National Health Service. There are good tax reasons why this would not be a sensible change to make. I believe strongly in having as wide a tax base as possible and, therefore, rates of tax that are as low as possible. Before we introduce a new tax relief such as this, we need the clearest possible evidence that it would be effective and that the change is genuinely needed.

We are told that when the change is introduced in 1990-91 it will cost £40 million. Almost all of it will be a deadweight cost. In other words, the relief will go to people who are already making those payments without tax relief. The Red Book says that the Treasury has assumed that in 1990-91 the number of people paying premiums, as a result of the relief, will rise by 10 per cent. I do not believe that that is a sufficiently large percentage; if it were a much larger percentage, there might be some justification for it. I do not believe that the case for the new relief has been proved. It sets an unfortunate precedent.

All hon. Members have received representations from constituents who believe that there ought to be tax relief on the cost of commuting into London. The only result would be that people would move even further out of London. We have also received representations about tax relief on the cost of private education. The same argument is used—that it would relieve the pressure on the state-maintained education sector.

I am all in favour, of course, of allowing people to make a choice whether or not they use the National Health Service, but I have never understood the argument used by the Leader of the Opposition, who complains that the Prime Minister does not use the NHS. Anybody who does not use it is obviously relieving it of a certain degree of obligation and a certain amount of work.

It is quite another thing to take a further step and to use taxpayers' money—because that is what it is—to give one group special relief. Not only could we give this £40 million to the NHS, but we could give it to all retired taxpayers rather than discriminating. I do not believe the case has been made, but of course there will be a major debate on this in a couple of weeks' time, and we shall be able to explore the arguments more fully. I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friends have to say to support this in rather more detail.

Finally, I make it clear that, subject to that one proviso, I support this Finance Bill. I support all the measures in it. Many of them have been welcomed, particularly those which help old people and charities. Many of them make further changes which will help the performance of the economy. I therefore support Second Reading.

6.10 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) made two points which interested me particularly. We can admire him for his stand on medical insurance and look forward to his further contributions on that. This kind of tax law is wrong, as he rightly says, as well as the other things which we on the Opposition Benches also believe to be wrong. However, he left out stamp duty. After all, if there were a tax I would have expected this Government to do something about, the £2 billion raised by stamp duty might have been one of the front runners.

The Chief Secretary today broke a long-standing tradition, which has been going ever since the Treasury and Civil Service Committee came into being, of

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

congratulating the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) on his work. We heard neither the congratulation nor any mention of the report, which was quite surprising, particularly since the Order Paper for today says:

"*Finance Bill:* Second Reading

The Second Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1988-89 on the 1989 Budget (HC288) is relevant."

However, it was not relevant to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who did not mention it at all. What we have had instead of useful discussion and debate is a mammoth Finance Bill. I believe one always gets a mammoth Finance Bill when a Government run out of ideas. Experience over 25 years has taught me that.

Such a Bill deals with the boring detail at which a Government start looking when they do not know what else to do. The Inland Revenue pours out representations which would produce a Finance Bill of thousands of pages if they were all accepted, but what a resolute Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chief Secretary and Financial Secretary should say is, "This is nonsense. We cannot have this," and run the Finance Bill according to the wider policies. It did not happen on this occasion.

I support the Chancellor of the Exchequer strongly on one matter. I supported entry into the Community but, like the right hon. Member for Worthing, I am wholly against economic and monetary union as proposed in the Delors report. If we were to get it—and that is a very big if at the moment—the question would arise as to who controls it, who implements the decisions, who really decides these matters. We had the argument right up to 1945 with the Bank of England. We had the gold standard. The bankers were in charge. They ran the whole show, because no Government knew very much about it, and the Bank of England was a powerful body with that level of expertise; it knew how markets operated, and in the end generally got its own way.

The crucial thing we learned was that banking decisions are political decisions. Exchange rates and interest rates are not decisions for bankers alone. To control the banks with a strong, united British Government even now is not an easy matter, as any Chancellor of the Exchequer or Treasury Minister will confirm, but to control a Eurobank, with inevitable disunity among the 12 states, means in effect that the bank will make the decisions. There is no other central body powerful and knowledgeable enough to contend with such authority.

In Britain it is thought that the Government decide and the bank influences. That is far too simplistic a view. In fact, there is an inter-relationship with the power of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, after all, can appoint the governor and has many other powers as well. This inter-relationship is very complicated. It is only in recent years that we have had in the Treasury a level of expertise which can take an overview of the bank's problems and involvement. Until the last 10 years we did not even have that; the governor view was the only view based upon experience and understanding. We now at least have in the Treasury something that contends with that view; not wins but contends. As a result, there is a more useful dialogue than there used to be when the bank jealously protected its power through the knowledge and understanding it had.

Let us not be fooled by those who will tell us we should have our own voice in the central bank and we will all be part of the decision-making process. It will be another British banker's voice, and my guess is that it will be indistinguishable from that of the others who will find a dominant role as a consequence of the transfer of functions. We should be aware that there is no power to give the politicians in any of these countries the ability to operate the bank for the interests of the Community as a whole and of the individual member states. So I welcome the strong views expressed by the Government and support them fully.

Turning to the balance of payments, my criticism that what the Government did was wrong was not to do with the consequences of the stock exchange fall. What they did was right but too late. There should have been a credit squeeze last autumn. It was a terrible mistake. They could have introduced credit controls. Of course, we know that none of these measures is perfect. Nothing a Government ever did is perfect. They take certain actions which are better than others, but they could have had an immediate impact.

We all know, of course, that they can borrow from overseas banks, but the question we have to ask ourselves —the sensible political question which, after all, we are here to ask—is what the ordinary person would do if, having been told by Curry's or some other high street store that there was a deposit to be paid on a new video, he was told that his British bank would not allow the loan. Would he go straight to an overseas bank and negotiate a dollar loan? Of course not. We are politicians; we see our constituents. How many of them would do that?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Some of mine would.

Mr. Sheldon: Over time of course there would be some; there would be some like the constituents of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who would go straight to the overseas bank, but that is not true of my constituents. Over a period of time they would begin to learn and understand about these things, but by that time something would have been done. There would have been an immediate impact. It is no use coming seven months later, when we still have those high levels of sales in the high street. It is a disgrace. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has failed miserably in doing now what should have been done seven months ago, and it is because he had a simplistic approach. Of course, we all know that if exchange rates are kept long enough and high enough they will reduce the level of economic activity. But they do not discriminate.

There were methods by which the Chancellor could have brought about a quicker change. Every month we have delayed, the adjustments to high spending have made the landing much more likely to be hard. This should have been the overriding principle: the sooner we act, the softer the landing is. The Chancellor of the Exchequer ignored that, and the results are there for us to see.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and others pointed out, we have not heard much about the economic miracle today. We heard a little about it, but not much. We know that the economic miracle was based on North sea oil, which produced the balance of payments surplus.

We can forget about the revenue, as that is small stuff compared with the balance of payments surplus which allowed the Government a profligate spending spree and permitted the elevation of financial services, with money passing from hand to hand with bits sticking to fingers on

the way. It allowed us a stature in excess of our true position and it allowed us to scorn our manufacturing industry. The Government call it an economic miracle. North sea oil solved the balance of payments problem for the seven fat years, but now we may have to prepare for the seven lean years. Obviously, North sea oil will continue but it will not provide the cushion or the feather bed that it has provided so far, and we do not have the manufacturing industry that we once had.

Ten years ago things were very different. The Government destroyed one third of the companies in my constituency, which had levels of pay and employment far better than most parts of the country, and high skills and medium technology industries which, alas, exist no longer. If I were superstitious I would instance the curse of oil —the way in which so many countries have abused that wondrous gift. Iran, Iraq, Libya and Mexico have reacted to the unexpected arrival of the fortunes of oil by abusing their good fortune. It might have been expected that a mature economic and political power would have had the good sense to avoid folly when arriving at great fortuitous wealth by using it to prepare for the future. Well, the future has arrived and the Government do not know how to deal with it because they did not prepare for it.

The memorial to the Government's lack of foresight is our balance of payments deficit, compounded by our dilapidated society with unmade roads and railways, where accidents happen and schools are not properly maintained, while countries such as Germany, Japan, Italy and France have flourished without the oil. The oil revenues have some of the characteristics of capital rather than income, which can be renewed and increased. Through depletion, our oil rigs and the fuel they provide represent a finite resource which, like the nationalised industries being privatised, can be sold only once. In the selling-off we should have obtained true lasting value for those precious assets, rather than the meretricious goods we have obtained.

What should have happened is that our industry—our main renewable source of wealth—and the educational advancements which are its main protection should have been the beneficiaries of the capital windfall. But we face the future in a worse position than when North sea oil was just a gleam in the eye of the Treasury.

I shall deal briefly with the monetary mania which we do not hear quite as much about as we used to. I have noticed with amusement the changing patterns of sterling, M3, M1 and MO. It is like a person trying to lose weight who changes his diet at every meal and then is surprised and confused when he remains overweight. But M3, M1 or MO have been dealt with with unbelievable naivety. Those hard-headed men and women of the world are supposed to be knowledgeable about markets as well. I would not trust them in the Petticoat lane market let alone the Chicago futures market or the London metal exchange. That view was reinforced when the former Chancellor of the Exchequer had his trousers stolen on the London to Manchester sleeper. Despite their formidable presence at international meetings, the Government are naive in their adulation of what they do not understand—the way in which the market system operates.

When the Government applied those naiveties to public expenditure, first they aimed to cut total expenditure, but they did not. Then they decided to stabilise public expenditure in real terms, but they did not achieve that either. They then decided that public expenditure as a proportion of national income should fall. It moved from 43¼ per cent. in 1979 to 47 per cent., although it is coming down now. None of those crucial elements of the operation of the economy—whether crucial is defined by the Opposition or by the Government—has been at all successful. I am not sure whether the presence of Alan Walters will improve matters. It is rather humiliating to have as one's next-door neighbour someone who has been brought in to examine the way one is running things.

Despite what has been said, the outlook is not rosy, the economic miracle has not happened and the optimism is ludicrously misplaced. The Finance Bill has failed to deal with a truly serious position, and we shall have to return once again to our basic economic problems.

6.24 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I thought at the time that last year's Budget was the best Budget I had ever heard. This year's Budget continues what has now become an established tradition—sound financing of the economy, sensible, far-reaching tax reform, repayment of some of the national debt to the benefit of future generations, and more help to pensioners, particularly through the abolition of the earnings rule.

I shall concentrate on two points, one a major matter and the other less so. The major matter concerns the thresholds of taxation, the points at which low earners enter tax. It is important to make sure that the thresholds of taxation do not bite too hard. The higher the thresholds, the greater the incentive to work and the less damaging the effect of the poverty trap. So the Government were absolutely right gradually to increase the thresholds of income tax over the years in a way which has removed or at least reduced the poverty trap. But this year my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer increased the thresholds by introducing a major and welcome reform of national insurance thresholds.

National insurance is a quite extraordinary animal. In the past two years I have called on my right hon. Friend to abolish it outright, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) should add it to his list of taxes which should be abolished. Nevertheless, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor severely weakened my case for abolition by removing the steps between 5 per cent., 7 per cent. and 9 per cent. and by reducing the initial payment of national insurance from £2·15 to 86p a week, while preserving the entitlement to contributory benefits which result from paying national insurance.

As so often, my right hon. Friend has found a solution which seems obvious but which had eluded us for a long time. I believe that there are still grounds for examining the long-term value of national insurance and whether we need to keep it separate from income tax with separate bureaucracy and paperwork. I join the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) who yesterday hoped that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor would not rest on his laurels. Nevertheless, I warmly welcome the Government's latest move, which is a major step forward which will benefit the low paid and improve the economy.

And now to minor matters, as Lady Bracknell would say, although the point I wish to raise is not so minor. It concerns clause 167 which limits the value of instruments of variation for the purpose of inheritance tax. I should declare an interest as I am a Chancery barrister and see quite a few wills and applications to the court by

[Mr. James Arbuthnot]

dependants who feel that they have not received sufficient or reasonable provision from someone's estate. I see a number of these instruments of variation, or deeds of family arrangement as they used to be called. They are agreements between the beneficiaries of a person's estate to rearrange the way in which that estate is divided between those beneficiaries. As the law stands, that rearrangement is given retrospective effect, as though the testator had included that rearrangement as part of the provisions of his or her will.

It has been said that people have been using these instruments of variation to avoid tax, and in a sense they have. But the great value of instruments of variation is that they allow people to be relatively relaxed about the contents of their wills. They do not have to keep updating their wills to keep up with changing tax legislation or changing family circumstances.

If people do not have to change their wills every six months or so, they do not have to incur significant legal fees, and I wonder whether we want to produce the effect of childen prodding their 80-year-old parents into rearranging their wills every six months or every year. As each grandchild is born, a new will may be needed; and as each Finance Bill is published, people may have to consult their lawyers—the lawyers always benefit; I admit that —to see whether a new will is needed.

As a Chancery barrister, I shall do well out of it, and perhaps I should not complain, but as one who hopes to see the Finance Bill as a whole become law, I question whether what is proposed is a sensible way of going about what the Chancellor wishes to achieve. If people begin to change their wills more often, the natural effect must be that clause 167 will not produce the yield of £15 million which was suggested in the press release. It is a small enough yield anyway in some respects, and if it does not materialise the whole business may be pointless. Not only will people have to change their wills more often, but it will be unacceptable for a person to die intestate. That was previously acceptable because one could simply rearrange one's affairs if the provision on intestacy were irrelevant or if it were not advantageous from a tax point of view.

Further, the clause as drawn will be easy to avoid by the skilful—indeed, even by the not very skilful—drafting of a will. Disclaimers, for example, have been left untouched by the clause. One can think of extraordinary ways of including in a will contingencies by the use of a disclaimer. That would have exactly the same effect as an instrument of variation, yet would produce no tax benefit for the Inland Revenue. The only benefit would be for the lawyers, who, as usual, would earn their fees.

We should be sure that new legislation will have some effect and will hit the target at which it is aimed. If it does not, it will not produce the yield expected of it. If it does, it will produce that yield only from those who are not properly advised. That will mean that the relatively poor will suffer and the rich will not, and that is not a sound basis for changing our tax law.

The Bill says that the change will not affect certain variations, being variations which are ordered by the court, which are bona fide settlements of applications to the court or which could have been ordered by the court. Those provisions are, if not absolutely meaningless, verging on meaningless. In any event, they will be the cause of an enormous amount of litigation. Again, those who will benefit will not be the Inland Revenue.

Therefore, despite my general support for the Bill and for another excellent Budget, I urge the Chancellor to reconsider the clause about which I have been speaking, because it is aimed at a mischief which, rather than being a mischief, is a benefit; because it does not stop even the supposed mischief at which it is aimed; because it penalises those who cannot afford good advice, while leaving richer people untouched; and because it will represent an absolute bonanza for lawyers.

6.34 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): For all its length and detail, the Bill can hardly be described as epoch-making. For that reason, and because I am a member of the Treasury Select Committee, I shall devote my remarks to the economic background to the Bill.

As usual, I begin by congratulating—I almost called him my right hon. Friend—the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) on his chairmanship of the hearings and proceedings which led to the Select Committee report, which was unanimous. We owe our unanimity, at least in part, to the Chairman's skill. Another reason is the concern felt by all members of the Committee about the seriousness of the economic situation which faces the country, and I was surprised that the Chief Secretary did not refer in his speech to the report.

I wish to underline what I see as the three most important messages of the report. The first is that the country now faces difficult problems in two connected, though separate, areas—the rate of inflation and the balance of payments deficit. The Chancellor and the Government accept that our inflation rate, which is the worst of the major industrial countries, is far too high.

But there has been a great reluctance, particularly on the part of the Chancellor, to admit that the balance of payments deficit represents any difficulty at all. The report makes it clear that the Treasury Select Committee considers that a current account deficit of over 3 per cent. of GDP—not only in 1988 but in 1989 and probably in 1990 as well—is an extremely serious matter which cannot be shrugged off.

The second message of the report is that the Chancellor is, at least in part, to blame for what has happened. As we say in the report, in the months leading up to the 1988 Budget, domestic demand was allowed to become unsustainably high, in part because of excessive monetary relaxation. The 1988 Budget then added fuel to an already overheated situation. As we point out in paragraph 50,

"the combination of intense competition in retail credit and the expectations generated by the announcement of tax cuts seem likely to have added to the growth of credit and had a powerful effect on demand through its effect on consumers' confidence."

The Chancellor himself admitted to us that mistakes were made in monetary policy in the period leading up to the Budget and that the four months' grace allowed before the ending of multiple mortgage relief gave a large boost to borrowing. Had the Chancellor come completely clean, he would also have accepted that his fiscal prudence of 1989 was in itself an admission of the malign impact of his 1988 Budget.

It is often said that the Chancellor's critics are speaking only with hindsight. That is factually incorrect—here I

disagree with the right hon. Member for Worthing—because many economists and City commentators, as well as Opposition spokesmen, urged the Chancellor last year not to make tax cuts.

I hesitate to quote my own speeches, and I do so only to demonstrate that those who adduce the hindsight argument are wrong. On 14 January 1988, before last year's Budget, I warned the Chancellor that if he cut taxes imports would be sucked in at a time when our balance of payments was already beginning to deteriorate. In the Budget debate in March, I criticised the Budget as being not only morally repugnant but economically risky. I pointed out that tax cuts, coming on top of a consumer boom, fuelled by an explosion of credit, would make the balance of payments deficit worse.

I also remind hon. Members that the Treasury Select Committee warned in paragraph 24 of its report on the 1988 Budget that tax reductions could contribute to overheating and, therefore, to our trade deficit. In paragraph 29, we also stressed the risks of allowing the balance of payments deficit to deteriorate. The Chancellor cannot claim that he was not warned about the gamble that he was taking with the direction and balance of the economy in his 1988 Budget.

The third message from our report is also an uncomfortable one for the Government. We are frankly sceptical about the Government's predictions of a rapid slowdown in inflation or a reduction in the current account deficit. On prices, we point to the underlying inflationary pressures in the economy, including those from labour costs, increased prices in nationalised industries and other Government-induced prices. On the current account, we find the Chancellor's prediction of accelerated export growth in manufactured goods over-optimistic. As the right hon. Member for Worthing mentioned, the Chancellor is over-estimating the so-called "adjustment effect" by which, as demand is squeezed, firms automatically switch from domestic to external production. Our witnesses could provide little evidence of that process taking place.

As a Committee, we have been criticised for not coming up with any firm policy recommendations drawn from our agreed analysis—that the Chancellor is on a tightrope between a recession and a collapse of the currency. It would be wholly unreasonable to expect a Committee drawn from such a wide variety of opinions to agree on solutions, especially when they go to the heart of the party political debate. The fact that we have agreed broadly on what is happening to our economy and what is wrong with our economy should, in itself, be a benefit to the House and a warning to the Government.

I shall now turn to policy recommendations and I shall concentrate on one of the main aspects of the problems facing the Government—the balance of payments deficit. I accept that one cannot isolate the balance of payments from other aspects of the Chancellor's policy, especially his strategy for inflation. As my right hon. and hon. Friends have pointed out, the Chancellor is now in a cleft stick. On the one hand, he has stressed the importance of raising interest rates and maintaining a strong pound to bring down inflation. On the other hand, as our report points out in paragraph 31, there is no evidence that it is possible to bring about an improvement in the current account without either a currency depreciation or rising unemployment and falling output.

I will deal with the balance of payments deficit because it represents the most immediate danger. We shall need to tackle our enormous balance of payments deficit much sooner than the Chancellor seems to envisage. If we do not, we run the danger of allowing our economic policy to be dictated by the holders of sterling, who may start to lose patience with the Government's handling of the economy. A run on the pound and a precipitate fall in the value of currency could follow, with all that that could mean for inflation and the economy. Our problem is that the balance of payments deficit reflects not merely an overheated economy, but a growing lack of competitiveness and, possibly, a fundamental gap in the range of goods that this country now produces.

The director general of the National Economic Development Office has pointed out recently that our current account may be suffering both from an overvalued currency and from not producing the kind of goods that people want to buy. There is evidence of that in table 3.2 and chart 3.4 of the Red Book, for example. There is evidence both of lack of competitiveness—or loss of competitiveness—and of growing import penetration. Those are serious matters. It will clearly take some time to improve the range of our goods, but it is possible, by depreciation, to compensate for our lack of competitiveness.

I want to quote what I consider to have been wise advice:

"our problem is that, taking the trade cycle as a whole . . . imports have a persistent tendency to rise faster than exports. We are, as a nation, uncompetitive in the only economically meaningful sense of the word: namely, that if we are to expand our national wealth at the rate of which we are physically capable, . . . then our balance of payments is in deficit . . . Conservatives . . . may feel that this is a field in which market forces and the price mechanism may ultimately be preferable . . . They may feel, in short, that the chronic imbalance in our international payments . . . is best dealt with by altering the price of the pound in the foreign exchange markets of the world."

That was written by a well-known teenage scribbler called Nigel Lawson, writing in 1966. The House should take note of his wise advice.

I accept that there are inflationary risks involved in devaluation and that is why we should consider not only devaluation, but joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system, which could act as an effective counter-inflationary discipline. Is the Chancellor now the right person to carry out the shift in policy and direction required if we are to bring our economy back into balance? I admit to a sneaking admiration for the right hon. Gentleman. He is a clever man who is at home with economic issues. I also find his boundless self-confidence, especially when he is making up economic theory on the run, quite engaging. But I doubt whether his particular qualities are what is required now.

The problem for the Prime Minister is that there are no obvious replacements for the Chancellor on the Government Front Bench. Judging by his performance as Secretary of State for Energy, I do not find the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) to be a credible candidate. In many ways, there are now more obvious candidates for the Chancellorship on the Government Back Benches. If, for lack of suitable successors, the right hon. Gentleman is made to soldier on, he will have to learn to change his tune. He will have to learn to become the Chancellor of the bad times, which we are now experiencing.

6.46 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I agree with the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) in one respect: the Chancellor is in an extremely uncomfortable position. It appears that he is caught in a cleft stick, while sitting on a tightrope while the jury is out interminably. The jury has not been out at all. Whenever the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service issues a report, it is free with its criticisms and that is its verdict. However, I have noticed, especially from the criticisms of the Opposition parties, that it tends to be wrong.

The hon. Member for Durham, North puts his finger on it. He pointed out the balance of payments deficit and he said that it represented a potential threat to the economy and to the Government. But I draw his attention to this difference. In sharp distinction to what has happened in previous years, the Government are operating a substantial Budget surplus. Foreign holders of sterling take real account of the internal balance within an economy when deciding whether to support it. They would observe, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has observed in the past, that we are suffering at the moment from an excess of demand which is going rather higher than our productive capacity can meet. That is a serious matter in itself, but I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that it represents a threat in the sense of a balance of payments run.

Nor do I agree that we should devalue the pound, which has been the recipe followed by virtually every Labour Government. It would be just as unpalatable now as it has been in the past and would be the surest way to create inflation. I am dead against it.

As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said, the Bill is the largest on record. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), I could have done without clauses 51 to 53, which I understand we shall be debating later. Private medical insurance does not seem to be the most obvious cause for tax concessions. One of my right hon. Friend's great achievements in successive Budgets has been to broaden the tax base and to reduce sharply the levels of direct taxation. That is exactly what we said we would do, and we have done it.

However, the tax concessions that we have given have generally been acknowledged to be in the national interest, whether in helping to promote the property-owning democracy, share savings schemes of one sort or another, or, through the business expansion scheme, to assist in finding rented accommodation, and so on. Those schemes have benefited the country. I wait with interest to see how clauses 51 to 53 are explained, but this proposal seems to be of a rather different order. It is a tax relief not just for the elderly but for those who may be well off to encourage them to assist their parents. It may be that those who are well off need education and some incentive to help their elderly parents, but many of us are in that position and this is not the most obvious candidate for tax cuts. I regret that this measure has appeared.

Apart from that, I warmly commend the Bill and my right hon. and hon. Friends' general approach to the economy. We have a substantial revenue surplus, yet there have been no tax cuts on this occasion and that is a responsible attitude to adopt. We are in as sound a fiscal position as we could be, but I am confused about what is happening to demand. I see what is happening in the south-east. House prices are falling. However, I also see the evidence of a shortage of labour, and skilled labour in particular, not just in the south-east but in other parts of the country. Wage rates are increasing and one-day strikes are just beginning. The BBC is not the most obvious candidate, but we had the Underground strike. These people feel that they will obtain more money and pressures are still building up.

The question is whether that pressure and the higher increases in borrowing will sustain domestic growth and keep imports too high. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) that it looks as if we are stuck with a high level of interest for some time to come because that is the only way of reducing demand to make room for more exports and to reduce inflation and to correct the balance of payments deficit.

Some economic commentators say that economic growth will have to fall to 1 per cent. if we are to reduce the balance of payments deficit to 1 per cent. in terms of GDP—a deficit of £5 billion. We do not have to be too precise about those figures, but there is no sign of the economy slowing down to such a rate of growth. Yet we might have to raise interest rates still further in order to provide room in the economy to achieve more exports. If we were to do that, we might once more see all the harmful effects, such as the soaring rate of exchange, that the economy and manufacturing industry experienced in 1981-82, and that would be damaging.

There was a strong reason for that in 1981-82, because inefficiencies were built into the system. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) made a charming speech, looking back on the 1970s when Ashton-under-Lyne was a great manufacturing centre. But the world has moved on since then. We are still a great manufacturing country, but fewer people are engaged in manufacture. There has been much greater efficiency in the past few years, but I doubt whether we can withstand another large rise in the exchange rate.

We need a different attitude and policy, and that is the one that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has suggested before—to align our currency with the deutschmark and, necessarily, to enter the European monetary system. That would not have any quick effect, but I ask the House to understand the difference that would make in dealings on the foreign exchange markets. While the pound is loose and unhitched, all companies with overseas interests have to protect their interests every week, look at their position and renegotiate or switch their loans from one currency to another. The demand for such foreign exchange operation would diminish substantially if we were to announce a formal link with the EMS, and the deutschmark in particular. I do not see why we should wait any longer. It would take time, but interest rates would not have to be as high as they are if we were firmly fixed within the EMS. In due course, interest rates would approximate to German rates.

Having joined the EMS, that is where we should stop. Despite what Mr. Delors said, we do not need a common currency, still less a European central bank. The Bundesbank is effectively a European central bank and we should lend it every support. Together, the deutschmark and sterling would become the Euro-currency. There is a lot to be said for the ecu, but, in reality, traders, business men and companies would deal in the strongest currencies, and they would remain the deutschmark and sterling. Those are the currencies in which most business would be done.

We should not be wet about Europe. We need to be involved. Indeed, we need to be in the driving seat. Our interest has always been the balance of power. We should not be isolationist or integrationist. We must do our best to stop this Euro-Socialism and Euro-bureaucracy which is suggested by Mr. Delors. The way to stop it is not to build Euro-bureaux for bureaucrats to man. It is a necessary part of Socialism to create a tightly enclosed, inward-looking, small band of nations, but that is not in the interests of the United Kingdom, still less in the interests of world trade.

The purpose of the EC should not simply be to be anti the United States, as it so often appears to be, but to reflect the increasing internationalism of finance and manufacture. A report which says that we are not manufacturing enough of the goods that we wish to buy has been mentioned, but one reason for that is the increasing internationalism of manufacture and distribution. That can be seen in the motor industry. We make parts here, but some of the biggest companies in Britain are buying and assembling agents rather than manufacturers, and that process will not stop. Britain is too small a base to manufacture everything and we are rapidly coming to the time when Europe may also be too small. Therefore, it is in our interests to open Europe to more investment and competition. We have seen that already in the amount of investment that the Japanese are bringing in.

We should expand the borders of the EC to include the European free trade area countries and then look wider still, beyond the European free trade area, to countries such as Hungary. This is a most exciting time. We are talking not just of arms and disarmament but of trading blocs. In the words of General de Gaulle, we can imagine a Europe sans frontier, extending from the Atlantic to the Urals. None of that will come about without willing it, and without our close involvement. We must take a grip on our affairs and engage ourselves in a common cause in Europe and the world beyond.

6.58 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): This Second Reading debate has shown that the House can discuss the tax details of the Bill and look at the changes in the economy and the effect upon the economy of the Chancellor's Budget in the time between that Budget and now. The Chief Secretary chose the former course. Wisely, he dealt with the tax changes and hardly touched upon the economy.

I agreed with much that the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) said, except for his opening remarks when he seemed fondly to believe that we do not have a run on sterling because of the great confidence of the international financial community in Her Majesty's Government. The reasons are baser. The interest differential is just about sufficient to enable them to keep their money in this country. If interest rates go up, the Chancellor will have to put them up again as well otherwise there will be a run on sterling.

In the short time between the Budget and the Finance Bill it would be trite to say that the economy has deteriorated even further. Inflation has got worse, interest rates may have to increase, and bank lending and the consumer boom have not abated, according to the latest figures. The balance of payments deficit is horrendous. In his Budget the Chancellor forecast a deficit of £14·5 billion for this year. The Select Committee bore out the view that we are heading for a far worse deficit, probably £20 billion.

When the Chancellor and other members of the Cabinet were in opposition between 1974 and 1979 they never tired of lecturing the Labour Government about how the tax system and the Finance Bill should not be used for the purpose of what they called social engineering. They said that the tax system should be neutral and was there merely to raise revenue for the Government. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) made the same point in his speech today. Once the Conservatives got into power, the story changed. Over the last 10 years the Government have used the tax system for the purpose of social engineering to a greater extent perhaps than any Government since the war, or certainly since the early 1950s.

We have some examples in the Bill. The tax system is to be used to give a subsidy to rich, elderly taxpayers for private health insurance; that is to satisfy the Prime Minister. Also, there are a number of measures to give tax relief for investment in unit trusts and other institutions. Because popular capitalism has failed to deliver savings, the Chancellor will bribe institutional capitalism to try to save money for him. Apart from some instances like that, there is very litle social engineering this year on the main elements of income tax in the economy. The reasons are clear. The Chancellor dare not touch it because the economy is in such a precarious state.

When the Prime Minister came to power, one of the vogue phrases—perhaps even a vague phrase—which was used constantly, and is still used, was supply side economics. It is not a well thought out phrase but it conveys the impression of the need for British industry and the economy to produce more goods, better quality goods and goods that are competitive with those produced by our major industrial competitors. I think we can all agree that the phrase means that.

When the Government came to power in 1979, Ministers had very little idea of how to achieve that goal except through a mystical conviction in the ability of the free market to deliver and the belief that a substantial reduction in income tax, especially in the top rates for richer people, would somehow galvanise management and production, thereby increasing supply and improving the competitiveness of home-produced goods. After 10 years the experiment has failed.

Perhaps the only indicator in international society of the success or failure of supply-side economics in the production of goods, their quality and their competitiveness is the current account of the balance of trade. The figures for British exports, for imports of foreign goods and for the penetration of the British market by goods produced by competitors leads inexorably to one conclusion—there has been no economic miracle but rather an economic catastrophe.

Over the last eight years our share of world trade has fallen by 15 per cent. The deficit on the current account of the balance of payments in 1988, the year that has just finished, was larger than the total of all the deficits for the previous 40 years. In 1978, during the period of the much-maligned Labour Government, we had a surplus on the current account of the balance of payments of £5 billion, and we had no oil. We imported oil; we could not export any. In 1988 we had a deficit of £14·5 billion on the current account when oil was still worth £7 billion.

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

Let us consider the figures for the imports of specific items, the goods that people buy in the shops. They tell an even more depressing story. In 1978 we imported only 18 per cent. of the colour television sets purchased in the United Kingdom; in 1988 the figure was 40 per cent. For commercial vehicles the figure was 22 per cent. in 1978 and 40 per cent. in 1988; for buses and coaches, 3 per cent. in 1978 and 38 per cent. in 1988. As to electric irons, which I would have thought were simple to make, in 1978 we imported 15 per cent. and in 1988, 65 per cent. That was another triumph for Thatcherite supply-side economics. Last year 56 per cent. of our cars were imported; for medical instruments the figure was 57 per cent. On and on the sorry tale goes.

The command economies of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe—they used to be called command economies; perhaps they are not any more—generally were not allowed to import more goods than they could export. In other words, they had to balance not their budget but their trade. They tried to get round it by borrowing, as we are doing now. If we had had to balance our imports and our exports over the last four or five years, the queues for cars, videos, television sets and washing machines would have been almost as bad as those in the command economies of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The position will not get better; indeed, it will get worse despite high interest rates. Next year the balance of trade deficit on manufactured goods is forecast at £15 billion by the Red Book. The Chancellor hopes that the position will be better in the first half of next year, which will really be about October 1990. Even that hope is not shared by many economists and forecasters. This year the deficit is running at £20 billion. We shall see what the figures bring tomorrow.

The Institute of International Economics in Washington believes that in 1992, when barriers to trade in the EEC come down, the deficit will be £45 billion. Of course, it will never come to that because long before that figure is reached the pound will have disappeared through the floor, and the Chancellor with it.

The Chancellor and the Government have very little confidence in the galvanising value of income tax reductions as a way of boosting the supply of British goods. If he still believes that last year's tax cuts were not responsible for the surge in imports, why did he not do the same this year? It would have been a very good year to do it. With a massive surplus of £14 billion, with a need to produce more goods and with a need to boost the supply side of the economy, why did he not cut taxes? Perhaps I should not call them the loony Right, but some Right-wing economists, perhaps even Alan Walters himself, were arguing before the Budget that tax cuts were needed. It was argued that interest rates should be even higher so that we would have a monetary squeeze and taxes could be cut to help the supply side of the economy. That was logical in their terms, but the Chancellor did not dare do such a thing. If tax cuts boost the economy, why did the Chancellor not cut taxes this year?

The Chancellor and other Conservative Members have tried to play down the importance of the deficit. Neither the City nor the public are fooled any longer. First, the Chancellor said that the balance of payments deficit was of no consequence because it balanced. That was an affront to common sense. He then said that it did not matter anyway so long as we could finance it. Then we were given the story that the deficit was really one of the problems of success. I suppose, on that reasoning, the German surplus is a product of failure. The deficit has been caused, apparently, by too fast economic growth. Indeed, it is a consequence, we have heard today, of the Thatcher economic miracle. Finally, we have another spurious reason being trotted out to us. Much of the deficit, it seems, is caused by British industry retooling and re-equipping itself, gearing itself up for a march on the markets of the world—again, of course, a consequence of the great economic miracle.

The only answer to all this is "baloney". A balance-of-payments deficit of this size is a serious matter. Even the Chancellor does not pretend otherwise. If it can be financed at all—and that cannot go on for ever—it can be done only by tripling rates of interest, which inevitably put up the costs of industry, very often causing new investment to be abandoned or postponed, thereby reducing the supply of the goods which we need to reduce the deficit.

One reason given by the Chancellor for putting up interest rates was to damp down the boom in the private housing market. But the irony is that if one borrows to buy a house, especially if one is a first-time buyer, one pays 12·5 per cent.; while if one is a small business man trying to borrow to invest and export one has to pay 15 or 16 per cent. to the banks. High interest rates put up the value of the pound and of course make imports cheaper and exports more expensive.

With regard to the retooling argument, I suspect that we are not a manufacturing nation any longer; we are an assembly nation. As has been said, we import to assemble; we have to import to assemble; and the idea that some of those imports are capital goods and are there to enable industry to retool does not accord with the facts.

Obviously, this Bill will do nothing to solve the problem of the balance-of-payments deficit, because, in my opinion, it is far too entrenched. Some time the Government will have to swallow their pride; some time they will have to put up taxes; some time they will have to try to escape if they can through the European monetary system or its exchange rate mechanism, trying to engineer thereby what they will call a realignment of currencies but which will, in effect, be a devaluation.

The tragedy of the last 10 years is that there have been so many opportunities in terms of oil and a favourable international climate and the Government have wasted them. The British public will pay for that for a very long time to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I remind the House that the 10-minute limit is now in operation and I appeal for the co-operation of hon. Members.

7.12 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I trust that the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) will forgive me if I do not follow him down the road which he has been traversing, for I wish to speak quite briefly on that facet of this year's Budget and tonight's Finance Bill which appears to have proved most contentious—the proposal to offer tax relief on premiums for medical insurance for the over-60s.

I must declare an interest, for I have lately been asked to advise a company called Denplan and I shall during the course of my speech refer to the unique service and product of that company, which I believe may well prove to be the most important financing scheme for primary health care in the private sector. Neither I nor my immediate family pay any private medical insurance.

I have long taken the view that those who pay directly or through individual or corporate provident insurance schemes for private medical care do so to the advantage, not the disadvantage, of the National Health Service. They have paid for NHS treatment through their income tax and national insurance contributions and then they pay again by way of an insurance premium so that they may unburden the Health Service of its duty to provide care in the event of illness. Without their additional payment to and treatment by the private sector they would have their malady treated eventually by the NHS. If they take away that burden from the state and in so doing receive treatment earlier than they might otherwise have done, we should rejoice in their earlier restoration to health rather than condemn them as queue jumpers, as the Opposition do.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that, at the very point where people's use of health care services begins to increase and their income falls as they near or reach retirement, the premiums for private medical insurance escalate sharply. The proposals to offset this escalation through tax relief for the over-60s means that in future fewer people will feel that the burden of premiums has become insuperable. More people who have formerly been covered by corporate schemes, either contributory or non-contributory, will feel able to pay individual premiums for themselves. Health care resources will thus have been extended by taking less tax off people than would otherwise have been the case, and thus resources for others using the NHS will have become greater.

Whatever the cost in tax relief—and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave several figures this afternoon, varying from £40 million to £70 million—that will be a direct subvention to health care generally and will make a direct contribution to reducing NHS waiting lists.

I wish now to consider dentistry. The White Paper speaks of medical insurance premiums being eligible for tax relief from April 1990. The Finance Bill that we are discussing today speaks about private medical insurance premiums in clause 51 and is specific about insurers in clause 52(8). However, clause 53(3)(a) spells out the conditions for eligibility of a scheme as follows:

"the contract either provides indemnity in respect of all or any of the costs of all or any of the treatments, medical services and other matters for the time being specified in regulations made by the Treasury, or in addition to providing indemnity of that description provides cash benefits falling within rules for the time being so specified".

That is a good piece of drafting.

Does my right hon. Friend intend schemes to provide private dentistry to be included? He must make that clear. Does my right hon. Friend intend only insurance schemes in the traditional sense to be covered? I would caution him about too prescriptive a definition on the face of the Bill in the primary legislation, for new, exciting and innovative schemes are at present developing. The traditional provident insurance has been ideally suited to discrete episodes of illness requiring perhaps periods of hospitalisation and cold or non-urgent surgery. Insurance schemes have generally not been able to grasp the nettle of chronic illness or continuing care.

Successful dental care is based on routine and regular visits to the dentist, who will provide continuing care and preventive advice and treatment so that substantial tranches of heavy treatment do not suddenly become necessary. One of the problems of the present method of NHS remuneration is that it encourages short-lasting piecework and discourages prevention. Piecework mitigates against quality. It is worth noting that the best insurance against oral cancer is regular routine visits to the dentist. Oral cancer has become particularly prevalent among the over-60s who, because many of them have full sets of dentures, are less than assiduous in visiting the dentist. A six-monthly check-up would lead to a much greater likelihood of early diagnosis of oral cancer for the over-60s.

What is needed, therefore, is a scheme which offers continuing care by way of a contract between patient and dentist and which also insures against unforeseen dental misadventures, including those suffered abroad, in return for a regular modest premium paid monthly, so that preventive care by the dentist brings the reward of having less work to do later. The company which I have lately advised has developed such a scheme, which combines continuing care with insurance against traumatic episodes. Interestingly, treatment is free at the point of delivery and is given in return for a regular monthly contribution which averages £6 to £7. Individual contracts between patient and dentist are made irrespective of whether payments are made under individual or corporate schemes and the participating dentists monitor one another's quality by a unique system of peer review. This is a good scheme which has achieved accreditation from the British Dental Association.

Rumour has it that dentistry is to be excluded from tax relief on medical insurance premiums for the over-60s and that only traditional insurance-based schemes are to be eligible. That would be a shame because I believe that continuing care schemes which have been pioneered in dentistry could be developed into a most important contribution to primary care provision. What is good for 3,200 dentists and 45,000 of their patients could well develop into general practice and other branches of medicine and paramedicine. The wide definition of what constitutes a scheme eligible for tax relief and the inclusion of dentistry would give continuing care schemes a fillip. The resulting reduction in the burden on the NHS would allow earlier treatments for those not able or willing to pay private medical insurance. Only the ideologues on the Opposition Benches would oppose such a benign measure as the tax relief proposed in the Budget.

7.22 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): When the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) referred to a unique form of care, I thought that he was going to talk about dentists operating on their own teeth. That would certainly be a unique form of care review. Apart from that, I will leave my comments on the merits or otherwise of private medical insurance to another debate.

The Bill and the Budget proposals from which it stems must be considered in the context of the current economic situation and the prospects for the future. It is easy to be

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

wise with hindsight, so I propose to do just that and consider what the Chancellor should have done last year and would have done had he been aware then of what he is aware now. It is easy to be wise with hindsight because it is difficult to forecast what is going to happen. Our economic indicators are so unreliable that forecasting is a discipline which is fraught with uncertainty and something on which we would not want to place too firm a reliance.

It is harder to say what the Chancellor should be doing now than what he should have done a year ago. When I read the Chairman's draft report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, I thought that it was remarkably anodyne. I was therefore surprised to read the press reports over the past few days stating how severely and stringently we had criticised the Chancellor and his team. Nevertheless, it is clear from the evidence which the Committee received that the present economic cycle has peaked. We must now ask how far we will slide down the other side, how deep will the trough be and how quickly will we fall into it.

The cliche of the Chancellor walking a tightrope has been mentioned several times. One slip and off he goes. Perhaps in the Chancellor's case, one decent job offer and off he goes—and perhaps not in the too distant future.

There is an awful inevitability about all this. Chancellor after Chancellor has tried to buck the trend, and to avoid falling into the trough which follows the peak, and failed. The Chancellor's problem is perhaps analogous to a surgeon who decides to conduct a delicate operation on the brain, reaches round to his instrument table and finds that he has only a saw and a sledgehammer. In addition, the quality of the team which he has with him is obvious.

It does not help to have blunt instruments, and most of the tools available to the Chancellor are sadly blunt instruments. It might help if he used more than one at a time. The effects of his blunt instruments take an indeterminate time to be felt and the total level of their effect is hard to predict.

The tightrope is not a very accurate description. Perhaps it would be better to describe the Chancellor as a man standing at the top of a very narrow peak with pitfalls on all sides. A tightrope would suggest only one or two sides——

Mr. Chris Smith: More like the inaccessible pinnacle.

Dr. Moonie: Exactly. My hon. Friend is trying to make me jealous. I have seen the inaccessible pinnacle and there is no way that I would try to climb it.

The Chancellor is standing on top of such a pinnacle and he is surrounded by potential disasters. The end point is recession, but the pitfalls include a multitude of inter-related factors such as inflation, capacity constraints which our economy has clearly run up against over the past year, the balance of trade, the value of the pound, the level of domestic demand, the level of investment and the rising level of wages.

The pre-election boom of 1986 and 1987 has come and is about to go and we are left with its after-effects. Excess demand has led to capacity constraints in the economy and to our worst ever balance of trade deficit in manufactured goods, and in construction materials to the extent of £2 billion last year. In order to make themselves more competitive, factories in my constituency must go abroad to find the machinery with which to retool. That is a result of the Government's policies.

Inflation has risen and will continue to rise. The abandonment of any coherent regional policy has meant that the south-east has attracted most of the investment and is now facing a critical and growing shortage of labour, while Scotland, the north of England and Wales still have unemployment levels of over or around 10 per cent., even using the Government's doctored figures.

The problem is compounded by our continued failure to retrain unemployed workers and by the present demographic trend with which I accept the Chancellor has very little to do. The number of young people entering the job market is falling. There is also a critical shortage of housing in the boom area of the south-east which makes it impossible for an unemployed worker in my constituency in Scotland to move here in search of work and bring his family with him.

It is therefore hardly surprising that wage increases are accelerating with the inevitable consequence of higher prices and increasing inflation. To cure the over-heating which has resulted from his policies, the Chancellor has selected his blunt instrument—interest rate policy—with the intention of choking domestic demand. He is predicting that the demand will switch to exports and that will reduce our current trade deficit. It is very difficult to find any economic analyst who agrees with the Chancellor about that.

I want to quote from some of the advice that was given to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and which is included in the report:

"Finally the balance of payment deficit now faced by the United Kingdom is larger than at any previous cyclical peak. There seems little reason from the point of view of supply performance to believe that the deficit will be easier to eradicate than in the past. Furthermore, while the deficit is running at present levels, the risks of a really hard landing for the economy will remain. There has been no instance of a major economy successfully running a deficit on this scale for any length of time, at least not without substantial depreciation in the exchange rate."

Interest rates at their present level have unfortunate side effects. They maintain the value of the pound and make us less competitive abroad. They increase industry's costs, making borrowing for investment more difficult. They increase the cost of mortgages, putting even greater pressure on wages, and that is compounded by the higher prices for water and electricity, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said earlier. The recent increases in petrol prices will not help. All those factors will drive inflation higher and place further pressure on wage levels.

High interest rates also attract hot money from abroad; money which could equally well flow out if conditions change. We are heading for the worst possible situation where the Chancellor will find that his crude weapon smashes domestic demand, which will lead to recession, increasing unemployment and inflation. The beneficiaries will be West Germany, the United States of America and Japan.

What about this Bill? The Government's policies have fuelled domestic demand and pushed up inflation, as a direct result of the Chancellor's folly. He has told us that he will not increase duty on tobacco and alcohol this year as that, too, would increase inflation. The result is a dangerous blow to people's health which, as he

barefacedly admits in his interview with the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, he holds less important than fighting inflation or presumably his own political future. Frankly, I would rather he had concentrated his energies on avoiding the price increases in electricity and water, brought about as a direct result of privatisation, and on increasing the price of alcohol and tobacco.

The Chancellor has done nothing about the availability of credit. Conservative Members say that nothing can be done about it. I accept that, as we approach 1992 and the internationalisation of our finance market, it is becoming more and more difficult to do so. However, when I see advertisements such as those yesterday in the popular press offering people loans of up to £10,000, secured on their houses, with nothing to pay until April 1990, I refuse to believe that it is impossible for the Chancellor to do anything about that type of abuse of personal credit. There is no way on earth that such loans are justified and no way on earth that Conservative Members can say that nothing can be done about it. Something can be done to choke off the worst abuses of the credit system, even if general credit squeezes cannot, or will not, be applied by the Government.

If the Chancellor were sensible, he would have given some recognition in the Budget to the need for a proper regional investment policy to reduce the imbalances between the south-east and the rest of the country, and, hopefully, to allow the economy to continue to expand as it could do if those imbalances were redressed. He could have redressed the imbalance between rich and poor and done much more for those at the lower end of the earnings scale. He could have signalled his intention to increase capital investment and encourage saving rather than consumption. He has done none of those things, and therefore we must sit and await the consequences of his folly.

7.32 pm

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): As I wish to address my brief remarks to two specific points—the cost of mortgages and house prices, and value added tax on buildings and land as contained in clause 17 of the Bill —it is appropriate for me to declare two interests.

First, I am vice-president of the Building Societies Association. I agree with the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) that there is no doubt that great hardship has been caused, particularly to first-time buyers such as young married couples, who have been induced and persuaded to borrow more on mortgage than they can afford. Due to the lack of rented accommodation, they have hitherto perhaps had no alternative. Therefore, in some cases, they have borrowed more than was prudent or sensible.

Like the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy, I deplore the sort of irresponsible advertisements to which he referred and which I too saw in yesterday's popular press. Day after day other loan companies continue to lend money on consumer credit and take charge of the unwary borrower's house.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) kindly allowed me to intervene in his speech after he had answered a question put to him by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) about the cost of borrowing on mortgage. Over the past three or four years, some banks, both national and international, and some building societies have done the house buyer no service and no favour by encouraging him to borrow money to a greater extent than was prudently sensible.

When I practised as a surveyor before becoming a Member of the House, most building societies, and most members of the Building Societies Association, encouraged members to borrow only two and a half times their incomes, or two and three quarter times their incomes if their wives were also working. Now advertisements encourage purchasers to borrow up to four times their annual income. This inevitably means that many borrow beyond their means which, because of the current level of interest rates, causes unnecessary hardship. Purchasers borrow beyond their means and, because more money goes into the housing market, it pushes house prices higher and higher. With the current level of interest rates, I sincerely hope, as I know does my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, that the leapfrogging has stopped.

I shall repeat what I said in my earlier intervention. I am certain that any borrower in my constituency who puts before me his current housing difficulties, born out of the current level of interest rates, has only to go to the branch office of his building society and explain the facts simply and honestly to receive a sympathetic hearing. The building society will reschedule the mortgage, freeze the capital repayment, and perhaps spread the borrowing over a longer period.

Secondly, I must declare my interest as a consultant partner to a firm of surveyors. I hope that the House will accept that I bring a modicum of practical sense to an apparently theoretical problem in the Finance Bill. That problem involves the imposition of value added tax on non-domestic construction work, which was brought about not at the behest of the Government but by a ruling of the European Court, published on 21 June last year.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury who, in conjunction with the Customs and Excise, published on the same day—21 June last year—a consultative document explaining the practical implications of the European Court's ruling and suggesting certain measures to bring transitional relief. Following the publication of the consultation document, there was a consultation period which, I believe, expired at the end of September last year.

I pay tribute to the officials of the Customs and Excise who listened understandingly to the many representations. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, whom I know from personal experience of taking constituents and others to see him to explain the practical effects of the ruling. He listened with sympathy and understanding. I also know that certain amendments were made to the transitional arrangements, because they were incorporated in the draft clauses published in February.

I put it to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury that the Treasury has not gone far enough in accommodating a number of schemes which, and contractors who, do not fulfil the conditions contained in the transitional arrangements. I relate my remarks particularly to schemes of inner city renewal, which are such a vital plank of the Government's manifesto. Any scheme which was legally committed by 21 June—the date of the European Court's judgment—will not be subject to VAT. A number of schemes, although not legally committed, were commercially committed. It is in the

[Mr. John Heddle]

nature of inner city redevelopment, and development generally, that the contractor will spend a considerable amount of money on infrastructure, planning, design and rerouting roads, under the broad umbrella of a head of agreement or a letter of intent that will fall short of a legal commitment. The imposition of value added tax, as contained in clause 17 and schedule 3 of the Bill, will cause considerable hardship and, no doubt, loss to a number of schemes committed to inner city regeneration.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to consider with officials in the European Commission whether transitional arrangements can be extended—as I am sure they can—to ensure that those inner city schemes, which may well show a loss for the contractor, are included in the transitional arrangements.

7.38 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Earlier, the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) eulogised about last year's Budget, which I thought was thoroughly irresponsible. This year, he complimented the Budget in part, which I did not think was much to write home about. I declare an interest because, like him, I am a solicitor involved in estate tax planning. I share his concern about the effect of clause 167 of the Finance Bill which has serious consequences for small businesses and many of the people whom we have heard mentioned in tonight's debate. When I refer to small businesses, I do not mean those run by the sort of people mentioned by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) who wish to invest £1 million. In all my experience, I have never had a client who wished to invest £1 million. I am talking about small farmers and business men, shopkeepers, those involved in manufacturing, and all who make up the fabric of rural society and who are in danger from the clause.

In recent years, many owners of businesses have sought advice on how best to ensure that their families succeed to those businesses on their deaths. Their concern is a result of the incidence of inheritance tax—formerly capital transfer tax—on death and also capital gains tax on lifetime transfers if a transfer was contemplated either on retirement or owing to ill health.

Giving advice on such matters is not simply a case of considering the tax implications; many other factors must be considered, such as the ages of children, the assets that might be available to a surviving partner and the relationships within families. Nor is it a case of merely looking at tax advantages: it is a case of weighing up the available advantages and giving the best all-round advice, considering all the relevant factors.

Most proprietors of small businesses whom I know have only one thought in mind—how they can make arrangements that are in the best interests of their families and businesses. That is the sole criterion. If they can settle their affairs in such a way as to ensure the smooth transfer of the business to the next generation without being subjected to substantial capital taxation on death, or on lifetime transfers, they will be content.

I want the House to understand—I make this point time and again—that I am not talking about wealthy landlords or City whizzkids. I am talking about ordinary people in rural areas who have a small or medium-sized venture, the value of which has risen in recent years as a result of roaring inflation in the property market. They cannot be blamed for that, and they do not seek to exploit it to realise their assets. They have few liquid assets on which they can lay their hands; all their investment is linked with the business, and all the capital is unrealisable.

Those with access to expert tax advice normally arrange their affairs in the way that I have described, and in such cases no problems usually arise. Circumstances, however, can and do change, and as such changes cannot be predicted there must be a period during which alterations can be made to meet the new circumstances without families being penalised.

Let us take the case of a farmer and his wife who have two sons and a daughter. At the time when the arrangements are made, one son farms at home and the other is at school, while the daughter is married and living away. It would perhaps be appropriate for the bulk of the estate to be left to the son who is at home, with separate arrangements being made for the other son and the daughter; but, as I have said, circumstances change.

Let us say that both the father and the eldest son are killed in an accident. The family may want to make new arrangements in such tragic circumstances. They may want to rearrange the estate so that the other son—who, say, is now at agricultural college—will have the bulk of the estate. Unfortunately, owing to the changes in clause 167, that cannot happen because of the resulting tax implications: in other words, the changed circumstances will mean that the family will lose out. Possibly the asset will have to be sold on the open market and divided among the rest of the family. They will have cash, but a family asset will have been destroyed. That surely cannot be the Government's reason for introducing the clause, but that will nevertheless be its effect.

We are not talking only about changing circumstances. We are also talking about people who have not the resources to gain access to expert tax planning advice, or who choose not to do anything about it. Those people themselves are not being penalised; they have left the scene. It is the families left afterwards who will have to face the crippling circumstances.

In my experience over the years, the variation rules are used not for tax avoidance purposes—as is claimed by the Government—but as an opportunity to solve two kinds of problem. First, they are used to put families in a position no worse than would have resulted had proper arrangements been made; secondly, they are used to take into account changes that have occurred since arrangements were made which there has been no opportunity to amend.

In my opinion, tax avoidance schemes are stitched up well in advance. They do not rely on discussions after a death, which can often be traumatic, hazardous and difficult to predict. All the variations that we are talking about require the consent of all the parties who are to benefit. Some will lose out: clearly, if there is a variation, there will be some gainers and some losers. It is very difficult to obtain consensus within a family after a death, and the Bill will make it impossible for any such arrangements to be made. The real tax avoider would not leave it to chance.

The Treasury, in my view, is aiming at the wrong target. The provision must be reviewed; otherwise, for the sake of an insubstantial gain for the Treasury in duty, many small

businesses will be driven to dispose of their assets, and the fabric of some of our rural communities may be endangered. I believe that that is entirely unnecessary.

7.46 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I wish to speak only briefly, but in so doing I shall give my reasons for supporting what I consider to be a very good Finance Bill, and to raise a few questions that Treasury Ministers may wish to consider.

Many right hon. and hon. Members have discussed the overall economic position at length, and I do not intend to follow them. Let me say merely that if it is true, as I believe it is, that our key economic objective at present is to restore low inflation—low, that is, by international standards—we should understand that the Treasury's current policy is heavily focused on that objective. We have the tightest fiscal and monetary policy that we have had for many years—tighter than many people appreciate. The instruments of that policy—public sector debt repayment and high interest rates—have come in for considerable attack, and no doubt the policy has its risks, as the Treasury Select Committee has pointed out. I believe, however, that the emphasis has been rightly placed on dealing with inflation, and that that will be shown to be so. All the other arguments that we may advance about competitiveness, employment and output eventually depend on it.

The Bill deals with the overall level and indeed the detailed structure of taxation. The reason I support it so strongly is that it takes us nearer to the point at which taxation is structured so as not to discourage people from earning more, working harder or achieving success, whatever their income levels. That, I believe, is the main principle on which taxation should be based; it should raise the required amount of revenue, with the minimum interference with the industry and efforts of the people.

To many outside the House, that may seem a statement of the obvious, but it is a new development for the tax structure in Britain to be consistent with that principle. Not many years ago the reward for success was to be penalised by massive marginal income tax rates: it cannot be many years ago, for even I can recall it. Those tax rates were presumably designed to discourage the payment of high salaries. Certainly their objective was not to obtain the required revenue, as the total revenue from the highest earners went up considerably after the rates were reduced.

It was only last year that people stopped losing more than half of any increase in their pay if they were paid more than a certain amount. Only following this year's Budget will some low wage earners cease to face their own excessive marginal tax rates, as represented by national insurance contributions. The changes that are to be made in national insurance contributions are welcome, as they concentrate what are in effect reduced tax rates on many of the lowest wage earners. Even so, it is hard to view national insurance contributions today without wondering about their long-term future.

Mr. Battle: Is it not the case that when the analysis is done what has been gained in the national insurance changes by people on lower wages is in fact taken away if they claim the family credit allowance, so that they do not gain a penny as a result of the changes and people are not taken out of the poverty trap?

Mr. Hague: It does deal with the excessive marginal impact of the national insurance contributions. However, we will always need to do more work in that area. Clearly further action can be taken to improve the situation.

The integrating of income tax and national insurance contributions would be an immense administrative task, given the contributory principle behind the benefit system. In the long run, we must ask whether the contributory principle is worth the trouble of having two types of income tax whose combined effect is to cause the payment of tax to start at a lower level than might otherwise apply, to produce some very strange ups and downs in the marginal rates at higher levels of income and, indeed, to make the benefits system more complicated.

I believe that the abolition of the pensioners' earnings rule also fits the same theme. Few of those penalised were earning a fortune. The change made in the age allowance is also very good. Previously some pensioners paid more than a 40 per cent. marginal tax rate, while the rest of the country had ceased to do so. Again, people will now have a greater incentive to earn a bit more. The changes in corporation tax for small companies are also part of this theme. People will have an incentive to do a bit better and earn a little more.

Thus, this Bill can be seen as part of a continuing and, I believe, healthy process. Last year's Budget did much to move the tax system away from stamping on effort and success; this year's Budget takes a few more steps in that direction. It is a Budget that does not menace, frighten, threaten or act out any vendetta against any section of the population. Having regard to some of the tax legislation in previous decades, this Budget therefore represents a rather refreshing and considerable achievement. We have not yet obtained a perfect tax structure, as even my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench would concede. It would be good in future to see fewer people pay tax and to see many doing so at a lower rate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said, it would be good to get rid of some of the taxes currently paid.

We cannot complain that this Bill lacks anything in volume. It is a daunting sight even to one who has never set eyes on such a Bill before. Clearly some changes which are buried within it and which have been spoken about by my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) have not yet received wide publicity but merit careful consideration. They referred to changes in clause 167, which refers to deeds of family arrangement. As I understand it, the effect of the Bill will be that people who would have had a chance to reorder the affairs of a deceased person by general agreement will no longer have that opportunity. The people most likely to be adversely affected are not the super rich who could have their wills rewritten every other day if they so wished, but the small farmer or business man who has never been rich but who has considerable assets in his business and who made his will many years before his death. The intention of the will may be frustrated in such cases by economic or legal changes in the meantime. There may be good arguments for the clause, but we need to hear them.

Members on both sides of the House accept that taxation is used still as an instrument of social and environmental policy. The increased differential between leaded and unleaded petrol is an example, and is widely applauded in the country. Another example is the imposition of duty on tobacco. I hope that the possible

[Mr. Hague]

impact of the increase in duties on retail price inflation is the only reason why my right hon. Friend has not taken more action on that this year.

The encouragement of charitable giving is another use of tax policy for social purposes. The doubling of the amount allowed under the payroll-giving scheme is an excellent proposal. However, I wonder whether the time will come before long to consider further tax incentives for charitable giving on a larger scale. I also wonder whether the Treasury has exhausted the limits of examining whether it is necessary for VAT to be imposed on village halls. Much is being said about the age of the active citizen, so it will be good if we could do a bit more sometimes to encourage the active citizen in his activities.

In summary, then, I applaud the Bill which, with appropriate caution, takes us closer to a fair structure of taxation in this country and deserves the support of the House.

7.57 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): My attention was directed yesterday to an article about the Secretary of State for Energy who was billed as the top table Tory who probably understands industry best. It was interesting to read the article, because it may well refer to the thoughts of the next Chancellor of the Exchequer, given that the present one is clearly on borrowed time. It was depressing to read the words of the Secretary of State for Energy because, if he became Chancellor, judging from those words there would not be any change in thought about the respective roles of manufacturing and service industries.

I found it depressing to read that the Secretary of State for Energy saw manufacturing industry very much as a phase from the past. He was saying that if we looked at the trend worldwide we could see that we would never need the same number of people in manufacturing to produce an absorbable quantity of goods.

It is important that he should say that, because it contradicts the experience in Japan where, over recent years, a growing number of people have been employed in manufacturing industry. The Secretary of State for Energy was told, in the article, that whole sectors of British industry, for example, machine tools, had never come back. He was asked whether he considered that that mattered. It is interesting that if one goes around the country visiting factories one cannot find a British machine tool industry, and there seems no willingness in this country to find the means by which it would return. In answer to the question asked by the interviewer, the Secretary of State for Energy said:

"Comparative advantage has to be the basis on which you trade. If other people make things better than we do and we deny ourselves the opportunity of buying for some false nationalistic reasons, we just put ourselves at a disadvantage."

Indeed, we certainly have put ourselves at a disadvantage in recent years. When one looks at the consumer goods in one's life, one can see how few come from this country. We must challenge the idea that there is a maximum number of goods that can be produced or absorbed. I cannot imagine that Japanese industry is saying that it must hold back because the world cannot absorb any more of its products. The idea that we can just leave manufacturing and that services industries will take over is specious. The idea that fewer and fewer people should be involved in manufacturing as being a measure of the strength of the economy is specious. The idea that people will turn their surplus funds to the use of the services of people is also specious.

I have already referred to the increase in the number of people in Japan who are involved in manufacturing. In the United States as well there has been a negligible decline. It seems that service industries depend on manufactured goods—that they are packed full of manufactured goods. I assume that we shall continue buying from abroad. All the services that I can think of will ultimately be replaced by goods. There is a tendency constantly to development technology which will allow the provision of a service to be by machine.

We used to have laundries, but they have been replaced by machines that do the same work. Dry cleaning is a service industry that will disappear once a machine is developed for use in the home. Cinemas—although there is a degree of recovery—are being replaced by video production. Many manufactured goods are designed to provide a service, and people choose to buy such goods rather than have those services provided by people. One does not go into a bank, for example, but draws cash from a machine outside it. There is no longer the need for the cashier inside the bank that there used to be. The interval between car services grows longer.

It is unlikely that there will be a growth in the number of people required in service industries in future. In the financial services industry, for example, people will be progressively replaced by machinery and by goods. It is essential that we change our attitude about manufacturing. The service industries cannot replace manufacturing industry, particularly in respect of exports. There has been a massive expansion in air travel, for example, whose export earnings are equivalent to what was earned in the past from the motorcycle industry. However, service industries cannot be exported in the way that manufactured goods can.

We must follow the Japanese pattern of spotting the manufacturing future. I refer to the home entertainments industry as one example. We cannot leave it to be continually dominated by the Japanese. We know that in future we must look more seriously at the whole area of fibre optics, high definition and digital television, if we are to operate on a European scale and ensure that we claw back our share of that industry.

The Government appear to take a hostile attitude to manufacturing. In particular, we are massively under-equipped in terms of work force skills. In 1985, the number engaged in manufacturing training was only one quarter that of 1968. In Scotland, Scottish Enterprise will rely on the private sector to provide better training, but the private sector has conspicuously failed to deal with that aspect in the past.

I cannot but be fearful about the future, when the Americans eventually get around to dealing with their own budget deficit. There may be some idea around that they are tackling that aspect. Recently, I have been very impressed by the publication by William Cline dealing with the global impact of the American trade adjustment. As an outsider, he has no reason to be deceitful. He observes that when the Americans get around to sorting out their budget deficit, it will be extremely worrying for the British because the weakest external sector outlook is

that of the United Kingdom, which stands in a class of its own. When the recession hits, as it is almost certain to do, then because of the way in which the Americans will have to operate—by raising interest rates, or by protectionism, or by using other means—Britain, which already has a considerable budget deficit, will be hit even harder. It is possible to forecast a further decline in Britain's manufacturing industry.

We find ourselves in the situation we do because of our historical neglect of manufacturing industry by Governments of both parties over a long term. We have not given our workers enough training, and neither have we invested enough in research and development. We have fallen behind. The only reason why investment per person in recent years has not plummeted is that we have one third the number of people employed in manufacturing industry that we had in the past. It is a simple fiction to think that in future we shall have low unemployment because service industries will take over. That is not true. We must tackle the problems of manufacturing industry with vigour and with a sense of interventionism that is conspicuously absent from the Government's proposals in the Bill.

8.5 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General has just left his place because I intended to begin my remarks by commenting that I suspect that for him the most important and interesting pages in today's newspapers are the cricket pages. I must confess that for me they are the racing pages —not only for their intrinsic interest but because the racing pages in both the national newspapers and the specialist press subject their writers and tipsters to the relentless discipline of having their forecasts checked there and then, that day, by the actual result on the race course. I cannot help thinking that if only the economic tipsters were subjected to the same relentless discipline, we might see a great deal more caution, and much more humility, among those who forecast in the House and outside it.

Let us take that notion one stage further, and reverse the situation so that the economic writers become the racing tipsters and the racing tipsters become the economic forecasters. I imagine that the quality of information that would then become available for national policy making would be a great deal better and more reliable than it is at the present time.

We have listened to a great deal of speculation—and that is all it is—about what might be happening in our economic life. We know perfectly well that most of last year's speculation was wrong—often badly wrong. The Chancellor was criticised, but most of his critics were just as badly wrong as he has ever been. We should bear that in mind. Economic policy is not determined by short-term factors of the kind so often identified this afternoon and this evening, but by much longer-term factors. The British economy in the 1980s is very dependent upon what happened in the 1970s. What happened in the British economy in the 1970s was totally dependent on what happened in the 1960s. What happens in the 1990s will be the product of what happens in this decade.

The House will bear in mind my interest in the racing pages when I forecast that there is a rich harvest to be gathered for this country in the 1990s as a consequence of the fundamantal structural changes made during the present decade. My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), in describing the speech of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), used the expression "charming". I extend that expression to cover the speech of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) because he and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne had responsibility in the Treasury in the 1970s, and they may look back with nostalgia upon their success during those days.

However, those successes were not viewed as such by the rest of this House, nor are they so viewed by the rest of the country at the present time. At that time they were not viewed as successes, and the position does not look good in retrospect either. So that those two right hon. Gentlemen are welcome to go down memory lane, but they should not imagine that they deceive anybody in the Opposition, anybody on the Government side of the House, or anybody outside.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne talked about how one third of the manufacturing industry in his constituency had been wiped out—so he said—in 1980 and 1981 by this Government. My constituents remember March 1979, when the Labour Government announced that Corby steelworks, which employed three quarters of the population of the main town in my constituency, was to close. My constituents do not look back with nostalgia upon the so-called golden days of the 1970s—far from it. That kind of analysis deceives nobody.

What my constituents do notice now are the enormous changes brought about by the investment that has taken place in the 1980s. At first, those changes were rather fragile, then they gathered steam, and now they amount to a raging boom. Every single week, when I return to my constituency, I see still more factories being constructed. Each week, changes are taking place—and this in an area that undoubtedly experienced some of the highest unemployment levels in this country earlier in the decade. That is why I am so confident that there is a rich harvest to be gathered in the next decade as a result of the structural changes that have been made in our economy during the course of this decade.

I welcome this Finance Bill. I welcome most of its proposals with very considerable enthusiasm. However, I have to say to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury that there are aspects of it that I find disappointing, and one or two aspects that are unwelcome. I will deal first with those that I find unwelcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) mentioned clause 167. We shall have to look again at that clause, and the criticisms by two people who are experienced practitioners in this field will have to be taken on board. In the course of the deliberations of the Standing Committee, I shall certainly do my bit to see that these matters are looked at again very carefully.

I agree entirely with the criticisms of my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham in his very wise and perceptive speech, and of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) about whether tax relief should be extended to people over 60 who have private health insurance. As the argument stands, I shall be unable to join the Government in the Lobby when these matters come to a vote in due course. I say so on the basis that it is entirely wrong to extend tax reliefs further and further unless there are the most profound reasons of national endeavour for doing so. At this stage I am not persuaded by the arguments that have been put forward for this extension.

[Mr. William Powell]

I am disappointed by the inheritance tax provisions in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield identified tax abolition as an entirely noble and proper course for Chancellors in their Budget speeches and in the ensuing Finance Bills. I have to say that it is time that the inheritance tax was abolished. It brings in only just over £1 billion a year. There are already enormous exemptions, and the fact is that, because of its arbitrary nature, it is capable of doing immense damage, particularly to the business fabric of this country. My hon: Friend knows of my interest in unquoted and family businesses. In the case of these businesses, inheritance tax can be paid only out of active assets. That leads to take-overs, sell-outs and centralisation of a most undesirable sort.

If we are to have the sensible regional policy for which a number of hon. Members have called during this debate, we must face up to the implications for regional policy of inheritance tax and its predecessors. Over a generation, enormous damage has been done to our regions by nationalisation, by the huge and burgeoning growth of pension funds based in London and using London as the base for their investment decisions, and by the subsidy to public companies taking over private companies, usually in the form of roll-over relief—that itself being necessitated by capital transfer tax, inheritance tax, estate duty, or whatever it may have been called.

I want to make two final points. First, I welcome the ESOP provisions that have been introduced in this Budget, but I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will not regard them as a panacea. They will be useful in encouraging employees, in giving incentives to certain types of companies, but many family businesses will find them irrelevant to their necessary task of ensuring that their employees too enjoy the kind of incentives that are increasingly widely available outside family businesses. I warn my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary that when we come to discuss in detail the Finance Bill's proposals for the abolition of the closed companies legislation I shall make it clear that I do not think that my right hon. Friend has selected the best means of doing this. There are potential nasties in the scheme that he has put forward, and we will need to look very closely at the proposals.

Lastly, I welcome very strongly the added incentives to motorists to use unleaded petrol. I am one of a growing number of people who, since the Budget, have taken advantage of that incentive, and I hope that many thousands will follow. They will not only benefit from lower prices but do their own little bit to see that further damage to our environment is limited to the greatest extent.

8.17 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Opening the Second Reading debate the Chief Secretary to the Treasury used again the oft-repeated tale about booming Britain. He talked about a dramatic improvement; he said that the country had never been in such a good position; he spoke of its outstanding record of success. I suggest that such descriptions have developed a very hollow echo for millions of people in Britain, who are not experiencing what the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) referred to as "a rich harvest".

During yesterday's debate on social security, hon. Members on the Government side, faced with evidence of social security reductions for those on the lowest incomes, had real difficulty in claiming that real living standards are rising. We are entitled to ask whether all the people in our society are participating in this much-vaunted boom in Britain. Are all getting their share of this increasing wealth? Recently, *The Sunday Times* published a comprehensive study of Britain's richest people. That may give us some idea who has been gaining as a result of this Government's finance policies. The next day one of the tabloids published an article under the banner headline

"It's still the posh that's got the dosh".

In view of the grammar, I hardly need say which tabloid it is. A sub-head says:

"Try Eton or the Guards if you want to get rich"

[Interruption.] Is the hon. Member suggesting that his name was in the list? I fear that it may not have been.

Mr. David Shaw: As someone slightly experienced in business, may I offer the hon. Gentleman a suggestion? Today, if one is to succeed in business, it is a positive disadvantage to have gone to Eton and to have been in the Guards.

Mr. Battle: I will deal precisely with that point later.

In this article there was a portrait not of the hon. Gentleman but of Mr. Ian McGlinn, a Sussex garage owner who, at joint 158th place in the league of the 200 richest people,

"proves that hard work and an eye for the main chance can catapult ANYONE into the jet set."

Did he do it by building up his car business? Sadly, he did not. The article says that in 1976 he

"dabbled in shares. He put £5,000 in Anita Roddick's fledgling Body Shop firm—now that it has been floated on the stock exchange he's worth £40 million."

That view—that share and equity ownership is the key to personal wealth in Britain today—was emphasised today by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

To return to the question put to me by the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), *The Sunday Times* put an entirely different interpretation on the wealth story. It said:

"The very limited success of the Thatcher revolution in transforming British society is graphically and grimly illustrated by the league table of wealth published in The Sunday Times Magazine today. Of the 200 richest people in the country we have identified, old Britain still looms large: more than half the list is made up of inherited money. Some 57 of the 200 are landowners, 55 went to one school . . . and 25 even served in the same regiment . . . No wonder Japan, America and West Germany continue to beat the pants off us in the league table of economic performance. In these countries people have grown rich through industry; in Britain the rich still come disproportionately from those who have managed to hold on to their ancestors' land and property . . .The bias towards old money is not just bad for the balance of payments. A country in which people can grow rich through industry is also a country which creates jobs. But there are precious few jobs in simply passing wealth on from one generation to another and the only industry involved is in avoiding the taxman."

There is another flaw in the tabloid approach that is often adopted by Conservative Members. Those in poverty do not have the choice whether to be rich or poor. They do not have £5,000 to put down on a shares gamble. That is not an option for the 15 million people who are living in poverty. It is not true that anybody can make himself a millionaire. He cannot.

The trickle-down theory has run dry. Real incomes have increased on average by 6 per cent. in the last 10 years, but the poorest 20 per cent. have seen their share of household income fall from 6·1 per cent. to 5·6 per cent. How does that contrast with the richest 20 per cent.? Their share has risen from 40 per cent. to 43 per cent. The trickle-down theory is not working; nor is the myth of the average wage that is peddled by those who sit on the Conservative Benches. Their view is that if the average wage increases, everybody will get that increase. However, those on the lowest incomes do not find that their incomes increase if the average wage rises. The average wage may rise as a result of those at the top end getting even more.

The Government are involved in all kinds of contortions in an attempt to present their economic efforts as a success. Yesterday they claimed that they were celebrating a rising average wage. However, all their noises about the need to keep down inflation mean that they have to insist on wages being kept under control. I make no apology for returning to the British Institute of Management and Remuneration Economics survey of wages that was published in the *Financial Times* on 23 April 1989. It said:

"Britain's directors last year received their biggest increase in take-home pay for 16 years . . . The survey found that the reduction in the top rate of taxation in the 1988 budget had helped to increase directors' take-home pay by 26 per cent. Their gross earnings, before tax and national insurance contributions increased by 13·9 per cent."

The Government's tax policies are manufacturing tax inflation. Emerging wage inflation is the product of last year's economic mismanagement when the rich were given back so much.

If the Government's economic policies have led to an illusory sleight of hand in the management of taxes and wages, the same is true of the Government's previous claim that the National Health Service is safe in their hands. The introduction of tax relief for private health care represents a serious breach in the principles of the National Health Service. The Government are clearly going down the road of tax subsidies in the Finance Bill. Its provisions are the first steps down the road towards tax subsidies. They will lead to tax relief on direct payments for health care, to special tax-free savings for private health care and eventually to tax relief on all such schemes, regardless of age, need or type of operation.

An article in *The Independent* on 15 April was headed "Clarke urged to extend tax relief to over-60s."

The article spelt out how key advisers to the Government, when formulating their White Paper proposals—such as Dr. Michael Goldsmith, the medical director of Medisure, the medical insurance advisers, and David Willetts, the director of the Centre for Policy Studies—are urging the Government to go even further. According to the article, Mr. Willetts said:

"I hope that tax relief will not cover just insurance, and that it will cover any direct payment mechanism."

It is time that the Government made absolutely plain what their attitude is to private health care. It is no use the Secretary of State for Health and the Minister of State saying, in an aside, that they believe that the changes in the Finance Bill are minor, interesting details. They may undermine the principles of the National Health Service.

If there is to be a tax break on private health care, it will lead to an erosion of the tax base, to a loss of income to the Exchequer and in turn to a reduction in the funds available to the National Health Service.

In July 1988 the Select Committee on Social Services reported:

"In our judgment the creation of a new tax subsidy on all private health insurance cannot be demonstrated to extend the total availability of health care."

The Finance Bill will undermine the National Health Service. It reinforces the Government's past policies and demonstrates that the Government are undermining their own stated intentions.

8.27 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): In contrast to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), whom it is always a great pleasure to follow, I must make it clear that I believe that the 1989 Budget and Finance Bill will be seen in retrospect as fundamental to securing good economic performance and rising living standards in the 1990s, as well as to securing a soft landing later this year.

I have read with great interest the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. It refers to the loose monetary policy adopted in the wake of the October 1987 stock market crash and says that it is now clear that nearly all conventional wisdom underestimated the tremendous strength of the British and other economies. However, it certainly did not look like that at the time. Perhaps the Select Committee allowed itself just a touch of the Monday morning footballer syndrome.

Earlier in the debate the Chairman of the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), seemed to concede as much. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not mind if I quote his words to the House on 5 November 1987 in the debate on the financial markets. In stressing the importance of effective action he said:

"The response of the Chancellor in reducing interest rates following recent events was the right one."

He then went on to say:

"However, there is still further scope for us to reduce interest rates . . ."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 1987; Vol. 121, c. 1134.]

I make that point to underline the fact that to have done otherwise at that time would in the short term have been extremely dangerous, would have flown in the face of conventional wisdom, and might well have precipitated a yet greater and more prolonged crisis of confidence in the market.

Clearly we still live with the effects of that decision, but we also live with the specific difficulties of a dynamic economy whose supply side has been transformed and where progress has been so rapid and marked that change and growth pains are endemic and unavoidable. Unemployment has been markedly reducing, yet we now face serious skill shortages. The problem is turning on its head as a result of the growth in our economy.

We should be very wary of knee jerk and over-simplistic reactions to the size of the deficit. Certainly it is extremely high and we want to see a change in trend. I have no doubt that change will come as a result of our very high current interest rates, but the present high level of demand and credit is a consequence of other aspects of our economic success. We should be very wary of further rises in interest rates before the present level has been allowed time to achieve the necessary result.

Much has been said in this context about the performance of the Government's statistics office. I welcome the intention now to get to grips with these difficulties by placing at least part of the Central Statistical

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

Office under the wing of the Treasury. I am sure that this will lead to more accurate statistics being made available. However, the inability to explain the £15 billion hole in the accounts is rather disturbing. Perhaps much of it is unrecorded exports. There is a revaluation at the end of each year of the export figures; they are adjusted and normally turn out to be much more favourable. The various measures of gross domestic product simply do not add up. Tomorrow dealers in the City will be staring lugubriously at their screens awaiting the trade figures and subsequently making judgments about our economic performance based on unreliable figures. We should pay far less attention to those figures and accept that a deregulated, dynamic, free enterprise economy such as ours is extremely difficult for the CSO to monitor effectively.

Following last year's Budget, which accomplished so many historic necessities at one go—the tax emancipation of women, the ending of confiscatory income tax rates, the translation of the PSBR into a PSDR—it was inevitable that this year's Budget would be lower key and more technical.

This year's Finance Bill underlines that. It can hardly be described as a user-friendly document—perhaps it never is—but it is certainly a considerably more challenging document than last year's Finance Bill, which I had the good fortune to examine in Committee. I fear that its comprehension and interpretation will provide a very good living for many City lawyers and accountants for the next few years. Nevertheless, if its complexity was foreshadowed, many of the Budget's measures themselves were not.

I believe that there will be radical effects on the savings market as a result of this Budget. The Chancellor has made a major contribution to the development of employee share ownership by allowing the contributions of a company towards an ESOP to qualify for corporation tax relief. It is encouraging to know that our representations to the Chancellor last year during the Committee stage, and particularly those of my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), who is currently detained overseas on parliamentary business, have been noted and heeded.

The measures which affect profit-related pay and employee share schemes will also be extremely helpful in promoting genuine employee participation in the enterprises for which they work. It is this Conservative approach to encouraging harmony and productivity in commerce and industry which is itself a landmark in industrial relations and which will have the most far-reaching and profound effects over the long term.

The measures for promoting personal equity plans are equally significant. They too will not only encourage savings and share ownership but will have a significant effect on the mortgage market. The financial institutions may well be able to demonstrate that a PEP mortgage is at least as competitive as an endowment mortgage and thereby wake up a rather sleepy corner of the market to the great benefit of the consumer both in terms of choice and competition.

As the reasonable man surveys this Bill and the Budget which forms its foundation, it will be hard to find much wrong with it. Certainly the abolition of the earnings rule and changes in national insurance contributions are pivotal. I particularly salute the Economic Secretary in his work on the promotion of lead-free petrol. I am delighted to see Gedling, as so often in other matters, leading the way in this. In my constituency now practically all garages supply lead-free petrol; one petrol station has 16 out of 20 pumps supplying it.

I do not wish to insult the ingenuity of the shadow Opposition Treasury team but, with the exception of the health proposals, there is very little they will be able to complain about in Committee. Yet those health proposals were announced in January and their announcement was therefore not part of the Budget. More important surely is the overall perspective on health. Our successful economic policies have provided for unprecedented increases in health spending, but throwing money at the Health Service is not a sufficient discharge of our public duty. We are now reforming its structure to ensure value for money and value for the taxpayer. That surely is our duty.

It is because the 1980s have seen such a fundamental change in our economic performance—indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the 1980s are the decade of the supply side revolution—that the future needs of the National Health Service, and indeed of the rest of the public sector, can continue safely to be met by this Government.

I support the Bill and look forward to its rapid implementation.

8.36 pm

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): According to the radio today, the CBI sees some signs that high interest rates are beginning to slow down the economy and hopes that will bring down the rate of inflation, which, even excluding mortgage payments, means we have the sixth highest of the seven major European countries. It is interesting to note that in real terms, excluding inflation, interest rates are the highest they have been in this country since the Napoleonic wars. Perhaps that gives a clue to how the Chancellor sees his present role, as the Napoleon of the British economy, the revolutionary tax reformer. Like Napoleon, the right hon. Gentleman normally stood with his hands in his jacket. However, Napoleon Bonaparte won real victories before his eventual defeat and exile. The Napoleon of Blaby's victories have been somewhat illusory, though he also, I suspect, will go into political exile.

The CBI also sees prospects of a reversal in the rising rate of inflation and—with illusions—holds on to the belief that it can contain the increase in ex-factory prices to 5 per cent., the present rate. That is in conflict with the evidence of the retail sales figures and the money supply figures. However, even the CBI has no faith whatsoever in the Chancellor's ability to tackle the balance of payments problem. It makes the point that a decrease in the rate of inflation will lead to further losses of manufacturing jobs and in the wealth-creating section of the economy. Already the figures from the textile industry, which is often a barometer for the rest of the economy, show a growth in redundancies in the knitwear and other sectors.

The Chief Secretary today boasted yet again of the Government's achievements in economic growth, productivity and production. I would like to look at each of those aspects of the British economy.

The British economy has grown less than its major competitors since 1979, despite the bonus of North sea oil,

which was worth about £18 billion a year in the mid-1980s and is worth about £7 billion a year now. Since 1979 the average annual rate of growth has been 1·8 per cent.—a miserly figure, even compared with the 2½ per cent. rate of growth under the last Labour Government which has been much maligned by Treasury Ministers. Manufacturing output fell by 14 per cent. between 1979 and 1981 and did not return to its 1979 level until 1987. In the same period manufacturing output increased by 38 per cent. in Japan, 25 per cent. in America, 16 per cent. in Italy and 12 per cent. in West Germany. Although the 4 per cent. increase in output in the past two years is above that of our major competitors, the figures I have quoted illustrate that Britain has a long way to go to compete with our major competitors.

The Chief Secretary boasted a productivity growth rate of more than 4 per cent. between 1979 and 1988—which is higher than that of our major competitors. But Britain is still 25 per cent. behind the EEC average in terms of productivity and still further behind Japan and America.

In 1988 investment per worker stood at £3,000 per head —lower than all our major competitors and only half the investment per worker in Japan. Even if we had a slave society worse than the restrictions that the managerial counter-revolution have placed on the conditions under which people work in recent years, investment in new machinery and new methods would always win and that is lacking in the British economy at present. Between 1979 and 1987 investment in industry rose by only 9 per cent. —less than half the increase in consumer spending. Manufacturing investment is still slightly below the level it reached in 1979. The annual rate of growth in capital stock —that is machines and plant—between 1979 and 1986 was only 1½ per cent, which is about half that of Britain's major competitors.

The Government's investment in real terms in schools, hospitals, housing, roads and general economic infrastructure has fallen by 50 per cent., and is likely to fall by a further 6 per cent. in the next two years. Without taking into account the decline in oil and energy revenues between 1985 and 1988, manufacturing exports rose by 23 per cent. while imports increased by 48 per cent. That created the balance of trade deficit, which is continuing to run at an annual rate of more than £20 billion per year. The net outflow of private capital of £6·3 billion in the first nine months of 1988 plus a further outflow of £5·6 billion in portfolio investment abroad amounts to almost £12 billion in nine months. That, in addition to the balance of trade deficit, shows that if there were a run on the pound—which could happen given the general rise in world interest rates and the poor performance of the British economy—even the Chancellor's much-vaunted currency reserves of £30 billion would be under serious threat within a year.

The Finance Bill and the Government's economic prospects cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world. The massive $155 billion America budget deficit, the further $130 billion American trade deficit and the massive surpluses in Japan and West Germany have created a total imbalance in the world economy. In America there is the added problem of corporate debt to finance huge takeovers. Many American loan banks have gone into default and in the next five or 10 years could cost the American Treasury anything between $50 billion and $150 billion. The world's major capitalist economies are in a far from rosy position. In addition, there is a continuing problem of Third world debt with a net outflow from poor countries to rich countries of $46 billion last year. Therefore, the situation is very different from the picture that the Government have painted of the British economy and the major world economies.

Although the world economies avoided a recession after the stock exchange crash more than a year ago, by cutting interest rates and priming the economy, that policy is now being reversed. Interest rates are rising and productivity and growth are falling. That brings us back to the situation which one would normally have expected to follow the stock exchange crash—the possibility of a growing trade war and a recession and all that means in terms of human misery.

I conclude by drawing a comparison between the Government's claims and what really happened which was so well explained by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). The top 100 millionaires in Britain gained more from last year's Budget than the bottom 1 million people in Britain. Under this Conservative Government the top 1 per cent. of people in Britain received a 55 per cent. increase in income while the bottom 10 per cent. have lost 8 per cent. of their income. The Government represent a class-divided society. The world economy is split so that, even in so-called boom years, billions of people live in absolute poverty and a tiny handful live in riches. I believe that that is becoming increasingly apparent and that a democratic Socialist society which controls and shares its wealth evenly will become more and more desirable in this country and throughout the world.

8.46 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): It is always interesting to listen to the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall). I remember his previous speeches on the economy which covered many world issues. He reminds me of the man with a sandwich board who goes round proclaiming that the world will end tomorrow. Unfortunately, his speech that the world was due to end tomorrow which he delivered last year appears to be wrong. The world is still around, the United States economy is still growing, the British economy is still growing and the only notable failure in the world economy in recent years is the Marxist-Leninist and Socialist economy in the Soviet Union.

The Finance Bill has been introduced against a background of a good economic position. The good news is that inflation is nowhere near as high as it was in 1979, earnings are much up on 1979 and economic growth is considerably higher than it was in 1979. Manufacturing productivity is a key statistic because of the very statistic that the Opposition always quote. The fact that we have lost 2 million jobs in manufacturing industry is good news because the 5 million people now employed in manufacturing are producing more goods than the 7 million people who were producing under Labour. Manufacturing productivity has increased by 50 per cent. since 1979—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition should listen and learn from those statistics so that if they ever get into government, which is extremely unlikely, they will know what to do.

Capital investment in Britain is going up at record rates, but, leaving aside capital investment in buildings and dwellings, the investment in manufacturing plant and machinery has gone up by 25 per cent. in real terms since

[Mr. David Shaw]

1979. That has produced the balance of payments deficit because about 22 per cent. of the growth in imports is the result of manufacturing plant and machinery having to be imported.

Machine tools are having to be imported as the British economy grows because the Labour Government in the 1970s destroyed the machine tools industry, just as they destroyed many industries. The motor car industry is a good example of that. In 1976, the balance of trade on motor cars was positive. The success of the Conservative Government in the early 1970s left Labour with a balance of payments surplus. By the time Labour left office in 1979, there was a deficit on motor cars. They had totally and utterly moved towards the destruction of that industry.

The Conservative Government have begun to reverse that decline. We have encouraged the Japanese and others to set up here. We have encouraged Jaguar and other companies to be more efficient. The way in which we have reversed the declining situation caused by Labour has been good for jobs and growth. I welcome the Finance Bill because it is a continuation of the achievements of Conservative Administrations. The Bill is part of the process of getting Britain right. It was not right under Labour.

I welcome the news for pensioners—the abolition of the earnings rule and the tax relief to be granted for contributions to private health insurance schemes. I welcome the benefits for low-paid employees through the changes in national insurance. I also welcome what is being done for share ownership. Everybody should have a stake in the community. All workers in Britain should have an opportunity to buy shares in the companies and businesses for which they work, and in other enterprises.

It is also good news to see encouragement being given to profit-related pay. Employees should be paid according to the success of the firms for which they work. It would be nice to have a Civil Service profit-related pay scheme. Indeed, we would welcome the Government defining "profit" in that sector.

I also welcome increased taxation on what I would call the car benefit. We should be taxing business perks. Indeed, there should be no need for such perks. People should be paid a fair and straight wage, not a wage with perks attached. Let us tighten up on all forms of business perks and tax them fully, with national insurance being charged on them as well. Pay should be related to the success of the firms for which people work.

I must comment on two slight disappointments—I would call them omissions—in this year's Finance Bill which I hope will be addressed in future measures. If I am fortunate enough to be a member of the Standing Committee, it might be possible to discuss at that stage the two key areas to which I wish to refer.

The higher rate of capital gains tax at 40 per cent. is too high. It has been recognised in the United States that it acts as a disincentive to investment in entrepreneurial-based companies. The 40 per cent. rate hits the gains of the very companies we want to help and in which we want people to invest. It hits the entrepreneurs who back those companies.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) referred to Body Shop. Had he checked his facts he would have appreciated that the success of that investment of £5,000 has created 4,000 jobs—according to figures I have—in terms of direct employment. The degree of indirect employment is much larger. Had he examined the contribution that is made by the founding members of that organisation, he would have discovered that they contribute towards CND—not a contribution that I would recommend all business men to make—although the hon. Gentleman might have some sympathy with the views of the founding members in that respect. As I say, he should have researched his facts better.

Next, I am unhappy about the lack of help for business expansion scheme funds and the fact that the Government have not included in the Bill this year any measures for BES projects. It has been said that BES is too oriented to backing property and that we must return to a scheme which backs real companies and real investment, such as electronics and manufacturing.

In Committee last year we discussed at length the £500,000 limit and whether it should be raised for investment in BES companies in the manufacturing sector. I extracted a half promise from the Financial Secretary last year that he would look into the success that BES funds were having in attracting finance for investment in manufacturing companies. As I pointed out, funds cannot achieve tax relief at the time when investment is made in the fund. Tax relief is available only when investment is made in the company.

Some adjustment was made in the Budget last year, but I warned the Financial Secretary then that it might not be adequate. I hope that the Treasury is examining the statistics. If so, it will be found that investment in BES funds is not satisfactory now and that it is not high enough. I hope that the adjustment for which I appealed last year will be considered in terms of an amendment to the Finance Bill this year.

It would be wrong for me to conclude my remarks without referring to one aspect of the speeches by Opposition Members. We have heard a great deal of criticism from them, but they have supplied no positive answers, no policy and no solutions. Conservative Members are entitled to wonder whether there was an important economic policy announcement last weekend from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) when he said that secondary picketing would be allowed under a Labour Government.

I hope that Opposition Front Bench spokesmen will now explain how secondary picketing would help the nation's economy; how secondary picketing would help to keep inflation at a low level and help British companies to be successful in exporting more. Let them tell us clearly whether Labour Members support secondary picketing and believe that it would improve the economy.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that we recently had another example of the way forward by the Labour party in terms of its policy to provide fibre optic cable to every household in Britain at a cost of £21 billion to the taxpayer?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) has half a minute left for his speech.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) makes a telling point. All Labour Governments have spent money regardless of benefit to the taxpayer.

We have had an important new economic indicator suggested from Opposition Members. I refer to the

number of people who, according to them, can afford to holiday in Spain. I remind them that under Labour we had a £50 sterling limit. Indeed, under Labour people could not afford to go abroad on holiday. The statistics of the number of people who take holidays abroad under Conservative rule have gone on increasing, just as many other aspects of the nation's activities continue to improve.

I welcome this year's Finance Bill. It is an excellent measure that addresses many of the nation's problems. It is part of the Government's policy of solving Britain's real problems. The economy is improving under Conservative rule and I hope that the Government will go on introducing Finance Bills of this type in the future.

8.57 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) dealt with some important matters. I shall deal in particular with the reticence of the Finance Bill to address the question how our manufacturing industries are to be encouraged to devote greater resources to research and development and product innovation. We also have a desperate need to educate and train our work force in skills adequate to propel our manufacturing industries into the 21st century.

So dismal have been the innovative and research and development performances of certain key sectors of our manufacturing industries in the last decade that—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) ably pointed out—in the unlikely event of Britain adopting some of the trade barriers favoured by the Japanese, our manufacturers would not be able to fill the gaps left by the prohibited imports, be they cars or wrist watches.

It is true that there has been in recent years, even in constituencies such as mine in the coalfields, a welcome influx of jobs in the electronics sector. It is also true that those jobs have the sheen of newness and modernity and that they are frequently a boon to communities that have suffered badly from industrial decline over the past decade. I hope that they are jobs that will stay, if only because, all too often, they have arrived because hard-pressed local authorities have risked precious funds to attract them in the first place. I also hope that they stay because they give constituencies such as mine a toehold on the hazardous slopes of the international electronics trade.

I am afraid that all too often, when the sheen of newness and modernity is rubbed away, constituencies such as mine find themselves engaged in a sector of the electronics industry that is dependent for its competitiveness and health not on the productivity records of its work force or on the excellence of its industrial relations record —important though those elements are—but on the innovations and development strategies worked out and decided on the other side of the world.

The Finance Bill seems to have been drawn up in the belief that there is nothing wrong in simply hoping that market forces will, somehow, resolve automatically our research and development problems. In fact, that is a belief that tends to encourage the views of an increasing number of transnational corporations that Britain is a fine place to set up assembly lines. We are often extremely generous with financial incentives for them to site here. In constituencies such as mine there is a prevailing low-wage economy and there are few pressures from the Government to source the key components of the electronics goods being assembled with United Kingdom producers. Of course, that is mainly because we do not produce many of the key components. All too often, those in Government whose job should be to mould and shape this country's economic environment are content to sit back and allow transnational corporations based in the Pacific ring, north America or continental Europe to draw away from us in the manufacturing innovation stakes. I hope that the Financial Secretary will agree that it cannot be in the best interests of the nation's economy to allow it to become subject to an increasing dependence on imported supplies of certain microchip technologies, the manufacture and supply of which are determined in boardrooms remote from the effective influence of our manufacturers.

In the past four years alone, the trade deficit in electronic goods has risen by a staggering 40 per cent., and that is just the main story. The subtext carries an even more ominous message. It says that our ability to win for ourselves a leading place in the world manufacturing stakes over the next decade will continue to be seriously impaired unless we recognise that there are mechanisms available to us to win that place other than the manipulation of interest rates and the wholesale surrender to the notion that the free market—and only the free market—can determine the rate and nature of manufacturing innovation.

I am not advocating a centralised Government think tank which would distribute funds to research and develop huge projects. We have seen the results of that in the disastrous Magnox and advanced gas-cooled reactor nuclear power station programmes, which swallowed up precious research and development funds at an unprecedented rate and produced little other than a troublesome, inefficient and unsaleable technology. I am advocating that the Government should reassess their priorities about where they see fit to bestow their financial blessings. In particular, they should concern themselves less with easing the tax burden of the best off and more with priming the pump of manufacturing investment and with strengthening and extending the opportunities for educating, training, and retraining those who will develop and manufacture the innovations to which I have alluded.

There has been little success in reducing the lag in training in this country and there is widespread concern about the continuing decline in our comparative research and development position. Those features constitute serious impediments to the transformation of our economy to one capable of rapid growth in the long term, as distinct from rapid growth from a comparatively low base in the short term. I have no doubt that industry recognises that it could have much to gain from an increase in training, but that does not mean that industry is prepared to meet the costs associated with increased training, especially as employers perceive that there is a risk that trained personnel may choose to shift their skills, after training, to a rival. The Government will allow that situation to continue only at the peril of our manufacturing economy.

The Finance Bill gives no suggestion that the Government are paying the attention and the respect warranted to those key problems. If that policy continues, it may result in more jobs on the assembly line of the foreign transnational corporations. But it will not result in an economy that is able freely to determine its own future.

9.6 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary made it plain when he introduced the debate this afternoon that the Government are introducing the Finance Bill against the background of the incipient overheating of the economy. That is a danger which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor correctly diagnosed almost a year ago and which he has addressed by a series of stepped increases in interest rates. I am convinced that that was the right response and that after the normal time lag of six, 12 or 18 months the increases in interest rates will begin to have an impact on the real economy. However, we need to take account not merely of the immediate problem but of the causes behind the incipient overheating.

There will be general agreement in the House that that overheating is due, more than anything else, to the precipitate decline in the net savings ratio of the household sector, which is in itself an astonishing reflection of the degree of confidence that has been generated by our prosperity in this country. If it is a problem, it is a problem of success, but, none the less, it is a problem that we must redress. In those circumstances, we should examine the Finance Bill against the three criteria that, in such circumstances, the Finance Bill must meet.

The first requirement is that the Finance Bill should be conservative. It should be clear that the Government are determined that until and unless private sector saving, especially household saving, revives there is no question of the Government reducing their own savings—that is, reducing their own surplus. There is a natural trade-off between monetary policy and fiscal policy, between the Government's surplus and the level of interest rates. The higher Government savings are, the less the need to increase interest rates to induce households to save a greater proportion of their current incomes. It is utterly fatuous for Opposition Members to argue at the same time that interest rates should be lower and that the Government should spend more of their surplus.

This Budget is conservative. My right hon. Friend is going for a surplus of around £14 billion again this year and one could hardly be more conservative than that. If the growth rate continues on its present course, the surplus is likely to be higher. Events over the past few weeks have thoroughly vindicated my right hon. Friend's essential budgetary decision. We have found that the financial markets have not collapsed, there has not been undue pressure for a further rise in interest rates and it has been possible to maintain business and investing confidence precisely because we had such a conservative Budget, which made it less likely rather than more likely that we would need a higher level of interest rates in future.

The second great requirement is that it should do something to stimulate the supply side. That is difficult when, by definition, there is no scope for a massive reduction in taxation and no scope for an immediate reduction in interest rates. Considerable ingenuity is required, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has displayed that.

First, my right hon. Friend has greatly increased the ceiling for the corporation tax rate for small companies —an important measure. Other most important measures in that area were incorporated in the Social Security Bill that the House discussed yesterday. There is no question but that the reduction in national insurance contributions for the low paid will reduce the employment trap. Other measures in that Bill which will encourage people to make an even greater effort to go back to work will also tend in that direction.

What is more, the reduction of the earnings rule previously applied to pensioners must also have not only desirable human consequences, but the desirable economic consequence of persuading many people to remain in employment longer, making their skills available to the economy and reducing the skill shortages from which we suffer and are likely increasingly to suffer during the 1990s when we move into a demographic trough.

Thirdly, in the circumstances that I have described, we must address the root cause of the overheating and do what we can to increase household and personal savings. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on resisting the considerable pressure from the Inland Revenue to burden the life assurance industry with substantially greater taxation. The regime that he has now come out with, and which is expressed in the Bill, will give renewed confidence to those contemplating taking out contractual savings schemes or increasing their existing commitment to contractual savings.

Most of all in that context I welcome my right hon. Friend's provision for expanding the personal equity plan scheme, doubling the maximum amount and permitting half of it, £2,400, to be invested in unit trusts. For the first time, the PEPs will be aggressively marketed. The financial pages of the Sunday papers over the past few weeks have given us considerable evidence that that is happening.

Personal equity plans are an ideal mechanism for mobilising savings on the part of the small saver and investment in unit trusts—I have no interest to declare on behalf of the unit trust industry—is particularly desirable for the small saver because they enable him to achieve a degree of diversification in his portfolio which would otherwise not be possible.

Within this apparently technical and complicated Finance Bill there is an extremely coherent nucleus of sharply focused economic policies which address very effectively the problems immediately before us. The Bill deserves the full-hearted support of the House.

9.12 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): We should be having this debate tomorrow because it is crucial to see the Finance Bill and the fiscal decisions that it enshrines against the broader economic background, and tomorrow's balance of payment figures will, I suspect, once again emphasise how stark that background is.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have in large numbers drawn attention to precisely that problem. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) talked about the balance of payments problem and spoke of the mistakes that were made last year when it became obvious that credit was spiralling out of control. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) spoke of the balance of payments deficit as the most immediate danger that we face. He rightly said that we run the risk of our economic policy being dictated by the holders of sterling. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) spoke about the deficit being likely to be far worse than predicted even at Budget time a month

ago. He spoke of a possible deficit of £20 billion this year and he perceptively pointed out that last year's deficit was larger than the combined deficits of the previous 40 years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) spoke of a deficit of £2 billion last year in construction materials alone. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) said that we had lost whole sectors of British industry over the past 10 years. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall) spoke about the specific problems facing the textile industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) spoke movingly of the damage done to the electronics industry in his constituency and the importance of innovation, training and research to its future. All identified the balance of payments problem as one of the key issues facing our economy which the Government should be facing up to. Sadly, the same concern has not been shown by Conservative Members at any stage during today's debate.

Last year's balance of payments deficit was at a record level. All the indications are that this year's deficit is likely to be worse. The Government's predictions are hopelessly unachievable. Table 3.3 of the Red Book, which was also highlighted by the Select Committee's report which came out yesterday, gives the game away. That table predicts that export volume will grow by 7·5 per cent. in 1989 as opposed to a growth figure of 3 per cent. last year, and that import volume will grow by only 4·5 per cent. in 1989, as opposed to the staggering figure of 14·5 per cent. last year. Can such changes from domestic consumption to export orientation be achieved in such a short period, especially when interest rates are at a crippling level for small businesses wanting to invest, coupled with an overvalued pound that makes exporting more difficult? Of course not.

It does not just need a shut down of major North sea production fields to throw the Government's predictions out of kilter. Those predictions are unachievable anyway. We must remember that even on the basis of those predictions the Chancellor is forecasting a balance of payments deficit of £14·5 billion in 1989. I warn the Government now that it will be worse and that will be a direct result of the Government's policies towards industry, investment, the exchange rate and interest rates.

Britain's share of world trade has fallen faster during the past 10 years than that of any other major country. That is the real economic miracle of 10 years of Thatcherism. In terms of our balance of payments and balance of trade, 10 years of the Prime Minister have produced not an economic miracle but an economic disaster.

What of the other key economic factors that we should be looking at as the background to the Bill? The Government constantly tell us that their central objective is the control of inflation. Let us look at their record on that. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), in an entertaining speech, took time off from his researches into the net book agreement to tell us that there was good news on inflation. When the Prime Minister came to power Britain's inflation rate was 10·3 per cent., lower than that of the United States, France and Italy, and just above the average of 9·7 per cent. of all the OECD countries. It is now 7·9 per cent. and rising. It is higher than in any major industrial country and twice the OECD average.

Just to ensure that that miraculous transformation continues, the Governmment's direct decisions on water prices, electricity prices, transport fares, rents and rates, together with the immediate impact of the Chancellor's own chosen anti-inflationary weapon of interest rates, have all ensured further twists to the current inflationary spiral. The attempts to mitigate the rise in inflation in the Finance Bill, by means of the alarming decision not to uprate the duty on tobacco and alcohol, pale into insignificance beside that overall picture. That picture shows clearly that a Government who set out to make the lowering of inflation their target, their principal goal, their judge and jury, have roundly failed in that task.

What of the high interest rate policy that the Chnancellor has chosen in response to the problem? He has chosen it with three apparent objectives—to help finance the balance of payments deficit and coterminously to keep the exchange rate high, to try to dampen demand, and indirectly to influence the inflation rate. It is a blunt and inadequate instrument at the best of times. To rely so heavily, so exclusively and with such blinkered vision on that one policy instrument alone is sheer economic madness.

That policy is leading the Government and the Chancellor into deeper and deeper trouble. With interest rates already rising in Germany, and likely to rise in Japan, with bank lending still rising sharply, and consumer spending obstinately high, with a continuing deterioration in the balance of payments and with a blind attachment to interest rates as his only weapon, there are likely to be even further interest rate rises ahead, bringing with them further mortgage misery for home owners, further investment difficulty for small businesses and the spectre of recession.

Yesterday's Select Committee report has been rightly much quoted in the debate, except of course by the Chief Secretary. The report pointed out that the Chancellor was walking a tightrope between inflation and recession. It is a tightrope of his own making, determined directly by his own decisions and policies. He cannot remain on it for ever. His policies dictate that he cannot avoid either the prospect of inflation or that of recession without embracing the other. On all these fronts—on the balance of payments, on inflation and on interest rates—the Government's performance has been and continues to be lamentable.

It is against that background that the fiscal decisions in the Finance Bill need to be viewed and judged. The balance between monetary and fiscal policy is clearly seen by the Select Committee. Last year's fiscal decisions directly fuelled demand. They were not only unfair but imprudent. We said so at the time. They staggeringly bettered the already better off. This year's Finance Bill does nothing to redress the balance, nor does it do anything to address the overall and pressing needs of the economy.

Let us lay to rest one myth right from the start. On 15 March the Chief Secretary said:

"We"—

that is, the Conservatives—

"are the party of low taxation".—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. 429.]

That claim is nonsense. The Tory party has perpetrated a great fraud on the nation. By adjusting the marginal rates of income tax downwards whilst at the same time raising other forms of taxation, it has hoodwinked many people into thinking that their taxes are lower. They are not. The people are beginning to rumble the Government.

In 1978-79, before the first Tory Budget, taxes took just over 34 per cent of GDP. Now they take 37·5 per cent., effectively a 10 per cent. increase in the tax burden over 10

[Mr. Chris Smith]

years. The Finance Bill ensures that the percentage will remain the same. Indeed, *Lloyds Bank Economic Bulletin* estimates that the burden may even rise by a further ½ per cent. in the coming year. Interestingly, that bulletin also points to the adverse impact of the poll tax this year in Scotland and next year in England and Wales. It says:

"The community charge will wipe out the lightening of the income tax burden over the last decade, effectively cancelling out a large part of the value of personal income tax allowances."

That is on top of an already tightening tax burden.

If, instead of considering the overall national income, we consider the fate of ordinary householders, and if we take not just income tax, which has gone down, but VAT, rates and national insurance, all of which have gone up directly at Government behest, we see that the average household has found its total tax burden rising from 35·1 per cent. of income in 1978-79 to 37·3 per cent. in 1988-89. That is from a purportedly low tax party.

Mr. Mans: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he is misleading the House in saying that the rate of taxation has gone up? Taxation and national insurance have gone down since 1981. The increase that the hon. Gentleman is talking about took place during the first two years of the period that he mentions. Since then the rate has gone down to 37 per cent.

Mr. Smith: I am looking at the record of the Government. It may not have escaped the notice of the hon. Gentleman that the Government, as they claim widely in current circumstances, have been in office for 10 years. I am taking their 10-year record; I am taking not just income tax and national insurance but the other things that people pay, such as VAT and rates.

Even worse, if we take the way tax changes operated throughout the income spectrum, we find staggering differences between those at the top and those at the bottom. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) charted the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Taking just direct deductions for income tax and national insurance, the tax contribution for a married couple with two children, on half average earnings, has gone up in the past 10 years nearly three times as a proportion of their income. For those on 10 times average earnings, in the same 10-year period their tax burden as a proportion of income has virtually halved. This is not a low tax Government. It is a Government who believe in low taxes for those at the top and high taxes for everyone else.

Of course, the Government got a little worried about that feature of their policy and about the impression that they were giving, especially in last year's Finance Act. So they trumpeted this year's Budget in advance as a Budget for the low paid. It was not. They include one measure that will be of some help, but not very much: the reduction of initial national insurance contributions to 2 per cent. It is not in this Bill, of course, because it is an insurance change. This is welcome, but its inadequacies are none the less manifest. By refusing to alter the contributions regime for employers at the same time as that for employees the Government have kept in place the bunching effect that keeps hundreds of thousands of appallingly paid part-time workers, most of whom are women, at a point just below the figure of £43 a week in earnings. Even those who benefit from the 2 per cent. change will in many cases face a corresponding reduction in family credit and housing benefit and end up hardly better off at all. This change, welcome though it is, does very little to solve the problem of the poverty trap.

One other major Budget change is missing from the Finance Bill because it is subject to regulation rather than legislation. The extension of personal equity plan tax relief to the purchase of newly privatised shares is nothing short of a naked bribe to improve the prospects of the flotation of public assets. We ordinary taxpayers will, in effect, be subsidising those people who seek to purchase assets which we already own as citizens. The sellers will be subsidising the purchasers and we shall not be receiving any direct payment for the sale of what we own.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): Bring back Adam Smith.

Mr. Smith: There is, however, plenty in this 180-clause, 17-schedule Bill quite apart from these two principal exclusions. It is a long Bill. I am tempted to agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne that the size of the Finance Bill is in inverse proportion to the quality of the ideas that the Government have put in it. I am also tempted to agree with the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), who described it as not exactly a user-friendly Bill.

Some of the measures in the Bill are undoubtedly ones to which we give a welcome. Clause 1 brings forward a differential duty on unleaded petrol. We would have wished to see the Government go further, but even some degree of movement is welcome. Ringing declarations of environmental concern from No. 10 Downing street are all very well, but it is about time that we saw some other action on the environment.

Clause 44 brings about the abolition of closed company borrowing relief in relation to business expansion scheme investment. This is a welcome end to abuse, and indeed we demanded it before the Budget. I am pleased to see that the Government have for once taken our advice. BES investors, now overwhelmingly those investing in private rented property—the hon. Member for Dover is right about the way in which that scheme has skewed the whole purpose of the business expansion scheme—were able not only to claim tax relief at the higher rate on their investment but, by using the closed company structure, to claim a further tranche of relief on any borrowing they undertook to finance the investment. In addition, they were set to make a tax-free capital gain after five years. It was money for old rope.

We wish that the Government had acted retrospectively and had seen their way to abolish the whole wretched private property scheme altogether, but as far as it goes it is a welcome change.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does the hon. Gentleman approve of retrospective tax legislation and, if so, where does he see it ending?

Mr. Smith: In this particular instance, yes, of course I approve of retrospective tax legislation and we shall be tabling an amendment to that effect when we come to consider that clause in detail. I point the hon. Gentleman in the direction of clause 167 of the Bill, about which a number of his hon. Friends have spoken and which enshrines retrospective legislation in terms of tax.

Clause 114 extols the regulatory powers for the control of the lump in the construction industry. It is a useful marginal change in tackling a continuing abuse of the tax system which also acts as a tool for the exploitation of workers.

There are various detailed anti-avoidance measures, provision for employee share ownership plans and partial implementation of the recommendations of the Keith committee. All this is to be broadly welcomed, although we shall want to trawl very carefully and thoroughly through the detail in Committee.

There are many other provisions in the Bill, however, which we shall want to oppose as strenuously and vigorously as we can. The first is the provision for tax relief for private health insurance for the over-60s. By definition, this will be available only to those who are rich enough to afford to take out private health insurance and well enough to be eligible to benefit. It is a precisely targeted benefit, targeted on those in the least financial need and the least medical need, and everyone else will have to pay for it.

Interestingly, a number of hon. Gentlemen, especially the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), have expressed their doubts, along with ours, about the wisdom of this scheme. The only major pleading in its favour from the Conservative Benches came from the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) who seemed to argue for its expansion to include the services provided by the company which he runs. To be fair to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and to the Chancellor, we know that they were very unhappy about the change, however much they now try to shrug it off as unimportant. It was forced on them by No. 10. Perhaps it was even given express authorisation by Mr. Charles Powell and Mr. Bernard Ingham. Perhaps it is also a foretaste of what will shortly happen when Sir Alan Walters returns to take up residence next door to the Chancellor and even closer to the Prime Minister's ear.

The proposal for health insurance relief is only the most blatant of a number of atrocious measures in the Bill. Take, for instance, the decision to uprate the personal allowances by only 6·8 per cent.—the very barest minimum required by law which sets the increase by reference to the previous calendar year's inflation rate.

As we now know, inflation is nearly 8 per cent., and rising. The real value of the tax threshold has been cut by the clause in the Bill relating to relief. That will have the direct effect of drawing more low-paid workers into tax. There will be about 150,000 more taxpayers as a result of the Bill and that clause. More people will be stuck in the poverty trap.

We should also consider the changes to the schedule E regime contained in clauses 34 to 39. The change from an earnings base for calculation to a receipts base sounds neat and logical. However, it opens up enormous opportunities for tax avoidance over and above the projected substantial loss of £60 million in a full year to the Exchequer, as envisaged in the Red Book.

Our principal criticism of the Bill, of the Budget and of all the associated economic decisions taken by the Government must be that the Bill represents a massively wasted opportunity. It does virtually nothing for the low paid. Last year's Budget was a gravy-train for the rich. The Chancellor should have redressed the balance this year, but he did not.

The Bill does nothing for the needs of women. It does not remove the iniquitous tax on workplace nursery provision which acts as a direct disincentive to discourage women from joining the work force. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury has told me in answers to questions that he has no idea of the benefit to the Exchequer of the tax. Nor has he any idea of the cost to the Exchequer of the minimal incentives which exist at present for employers to establish nurseries. The Bill should have scrapped that tax, but it did not. I give notice that we shall be seeking to change the Bill to ensure that it does.

The Bill does nothing for the needs of those with children. The House will be aware that yesterday we debated the need to uprate child benefit properly in line with inflation.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Where were Opposition Members then?

Mr. Smith: I noted from the Division lists that all the Treasury Ministers voted against the amendment tabled by their colleagues yesterday.

The real value of child benefit has already fallen by 12 per cent. since the Government took office. It is now set to fall further. Child benefit still represents the most effective way, by far, of removing poverty. To take the decision alongside this Bill to use the Exchequer's surplus for the virtually useless depletion of the national debt instead of taking the proper action to uprate and improve child benefit shows how sadly perverse the Chancellor's priorities have become.

Above all, the Bill and its associated economic decisions do nothing to tackle the deep-seated economic problems that we face. The catastrophic balance of payments deficit, the imbalance between demand and supply in the domestic economy, the imbalance between the regions and the depleted capacity of manufacturing industry all point to the overwhelming need to ensure that the wealth-creating resources of the economy are boosted. From a Government who have done such grievous harm to our economy over the past 10 years, the Bill will do little to repair and much to intensify that damage.

9.40 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): I am glad that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) eventually mentioned the Finance Bill. I do not mind him taking up too much of my time because I have precious little to respond to as nobody has mentioned the Finance Bill in this debate. When hon. Members talked about the Budget, they tended to talk about last year's Budget, which has somewhat dominated today's debate. I make no complaint about that because last year's Budget was a watershed Budget, the supply side benefits of which will be with us for years to come.

If the Opposition believe that, despite the fiscal surplus that it created, last year's Budget has affected inflation and the current account, it is certainly curious that, just before the Budget, the Opposition put forward a package for tax cuts, higher personal allowances and higher national insurance. It is also extraordinary that, if the Leader of the Opposition believes that this year's and last year's Budgets were irresponsible, he should then advocate, in his response to the Budget, that we should run down the

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budget surplus. One cannot be simultaneously against tax cuts and also in favour of running down the budget surplus. That does not make sense.

In the earlier part of his speech, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, reflecting the confusion of the Opposition, said that it was a mistake to cut taxes. However, in the last few minutes of his speech he said that the burden of taxation was far too high. I wish that the hon. Gentleman could make up his mind which it was. He referred to the proportion of people's income that went in tax. However, as we have debated endlessly in the House, the only reason that a higher proportion of people's income goes in income tax is simply because under the Government incomes have risen so much. I agree that the burden of tax is too high. We want to reduce it. If the Opposition think that the burden of tax is too high, why did they vote against us on every single occasion that we reduced the basic rate of tax?

This year's Budget was quite deliberately cautious because my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's priority is to keep down inflation. Inflationary pressures began to emerge last year. The current account was one sign; another was the evidence of faster than expected growth. There is already ample evidence that higher interest rates are having the desired effect. The targeted money aggregate, MO, has already slowed down and figures published last week show that the growth rate has fallen for the third month running and provide further confirmation of the sharp slowdown since last autumn.

While reducing inflation is primarily a task for monetary policy, it is essential that fiscal policy should support it. That is what the Budget does and that is why we have budgeted for another massive public sector debt repayment this year, which is the same as last year's in total, and, excluding privatisation proceeds, £2 billion more.

A number of Opposition Members suggested that the Government's interest rate strategy would damage industry's investment prospects, but there is no reason why it should because most companies are able to borrow long term. Long-term rates have risen very little, which is an indication of the market's confidence and its view of the long-term rate of inflation. That is why investment intentions in the latest survey by the Confederation of British Industry and in the DTI's investment intention survey remain strong by historical standards.

We have enjoyed a considerable investment boom in British industry over the past decade. Investment has grown by nearly 7½ per cent. a year on average in the 1980s, compared to just over 2¼ per cent. a year in the 1970s. Business investment is now a higher proportion of GDP than ever before. In the 1980s it has been in stark contrast to the 1970s. At the same time, the quality of investment has improved because the net rate of return on capital employed by British industry has nearly doubled since 1981. Excluding North sea companies, it has nearly quadrupled, and, whether including or excluding North sea companies, it is now back to levels that have not been seen for 20 years.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) asks, "Where is the evidence of the miracle? Where is the evidence of the real sea change in the British economy? Where is the evidence of the transformation?" It is there, in the return on capital and the profitability of British industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) have commented on the length of the Bill. I must say that, especially as it is about to go into Committee, I share some of their misgivings. Let me point out, however, that some 50 clauses deal with just three measures: the Keith committee recommendations, the abolition of close company apportionment—which I believe will be a major improvement and simplification—and the schedule E receipts, which again will become much easier for taxpayers to operate. Although the legislation to implement the changes is fairly lengthy, I believe that the end result will be much better and simpler.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who as we all know is a noted author, has been writing recently in *Accountancy Age*, and has said that the Bill contains no new measures to deal with tax havens and tax avoidance. Perhaps at that stage he had not read the Bill, but he repeated the accusation today. I can only say that the Government's record on closing tax loopholes is a thousand times better than that of Labour Members when they were in government, for all their humbug and rhetoric. They gave us no credit last year for abolishing the forestry loophole. This year's Bill abolishes capital gains tax rollover relief on gifts. It also deals with the close company provisions, the schedule E receipts provisions, the provisions relating to switches between offshore funds, the business expansion link scheme and, indeed, the cap on tax relief for occupational pension schemes. I am all in favour of such schemes, but I feel that there is a case for limiting relief at the top end. It has been one of the biggest tax shelters for the wealthiest in the country.

Did the Opposition acknowledge that? Not for a minute. Far from recognising what the Budget and the Bill do, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East had the cheek to refer to "yet another Budget for the rich".

Let me point out that in this year's Budget the full year cost of the income tax and national insurance changes of over £4 billion will definitely help those on low incomes, and that well over half the total amount will be given to tax units with incomes below £15,000 a year. The percentage increases on net incomes show that the low paid will benefit by twice as much as the high paid. The net incomes of people earning £5,000 and £10,000 a year will increase by twice the percentage of those of people earning £25,000. The measures that we have taken on national insurance are the most effective way of helping the lower paid.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) referred to the measures designed to level out the playing field between different forms of savings. The changes in life assurance to which he referred are designed to achieve, among other things, a regime that is a little more on all fours with direct investment in shares. The changes in personal equity plans criticised by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury will, I believe, be profoundly attractive to investors, and, indeed, have been given a positive welcome by PEP managers and unit trusts. The hon. Gentleman seems to think it is wrong that we should extend the device of PEPs to privatisation, but why not? We want to encourage wider share ownership

and, by marrying PEPs and privatisation, we can do a tremendous amount to boost wider share ownership in this country.

A number of comments have been made on tax relief for private health insurance. A number of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), have expressed reservations. Their objections are really in terms of tax policy. However, I must say that the proposed tax relief on health insurance seems to be the only measure in the Bill that gets Labour Members jumping up and down like dervishes. Their reaction has been extraordinarily overdone. They have not come here as guardians of fiscal neutrality, complaining that we are further than ever away from the platonic ideal of the level playing field in savings. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has explained, that is not a readily obtainable ideal. It would be absurd if Labour Members put forward those arguments because they rarely speak in this House except to plead for tax relief or subsidy for something or other.

The main problem for Labour Members is that they believe that private medical insurance is really the exclusive prerogative of the rich. In believing that, they are as out of touch with medical insurance and the health market as they are with housing. About 5½ million people —one in 10 of the population—are now covered through private medical insurance. About 600,000 people aged over 60 are covered by medical insurance. Those people can hardly be the super-rich.

I point out that tax relief will be available to non-taxpayers as well. We expect that the majority of those who will take advantage of the system will either be non-taxpayers or basic rate taxpayers. It is perhaps because Labour Members have an exaggerated view of the wealth of people who take out health insurance that they have an exaggerated idea of what the cost of this relief is likely to be to the Exchequer. We believe that the cost of the relief will be less than £100 a person, and most people will be taking out budget policies. That sum of £100 a person compares with a cost of £850 for National Health hospital service for each person in the country aged over 65. When non-hospital services are added, the cost for each person in the country over 65 is £1,000 per head.

If we can generate just a little additional demand for health insurance, that will relieve pressure on the National Health Service and the resources of the Government. That would be in the interests of the whole country, particularly the users of the National Health Service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said that the Opposition had not bothered to say much about their policies on taxation. Recently, we have had a few tantalising glimpses of such policies. We have had the odd appearance on the Jimmy Young show by the Leader of the Opposition, and he has made speeches in Preston and Nottingham. What seems to be emerging is that the Labour party objects to our very simple two-rate system of income tax—25 per cent. and 40 per cent. Most of us regard that structure as desirably simple in itself and think that it a good thing that we do not have a single rate of tax over 40 per cent. in the whole tax system.

Labour Members want to introduce a new starting rate and a new reduced rate band that would take us back to the situation in 1978-79 when there were 11 different rates of income tax on earned income and 13 different rates of income tax on unearned income. That is the regime that we had before and the regime to which the Labour party wants us to return. They want to finance such a scheme, first, by reversing the top rate tax cuts and then abolishing the ceiling on national insurance contributions. That would amount to about £3½ billion. That £3½ billion would buy such a narrow band of reduced rate tax that it would be of no benefit, or of benefit to precious few poor people. The drawback of a reduced rate band is that it goes to everyone, including the Duke of Westminster. It goes to all taxpayers. Only 10 per cent. of the cost goes to people whose total income is in the lower rate band.

If one takes people at the very bottom of the scale, earning just enough to pay tax—not necessarily the poorest people, because many of them are part-time workers—they would gain from a reduced rate band, but they would gain far more from the same costs spent on an increase in allowances. That is why, as well as reducing the basic rate, we have since 1979 placed emphasis on increasing allowances. Since 1979, we have increased allowances by some 25 per cent. in real terms. That is in sharp contrast to what happened under the last Labour Government, when the single person's allowance fell by a scandalous 20 per cent. in real terms.

The person at a slightly higher level of income—on three quarters of average earnings and above—will gain more, or as much, from a basic rate cut than from a reduced rate band. A reduced rate band, a new starting rate, is not effective for dealing with poverty because it is badly targeted, its benefits are an illusion, and it would be absurdly bureaucratic—requiring something like 1,300 staff to administer.

I am being absurdly fair to the Opposition, because I am assuming that their £3½ billion would be spent on introducing a reduced rate band. However, as right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House know, the Opposition have spent that £3½ billion over and over again. Last year, they spent £3½ billion increasing pensions, child benefit and benefits generally. This year, they spent it on a reduced rate band. Every time that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East makes a speech, he devotes time to his favourite subjects of training, infrastructure, regional aid and education. An Opposition spokesman for the environment in a single statement spent that £3½ billion four times over in just a few minutes, when she promised a £12 billion package to clean up water.

We all know that it is not the Opposition's arithmetic that is at fault. They have only one answer—that it will all come out of the surplus. But we know, and the country knows, that under a Labour Government there would be no surplus. There never has been and there never will be.

It is no wonder that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) admitted that Labour's tax plans would mean many basic rate taxpayers paying more. He can certainly say that again. The near abolition of the ceiling on national insurance contributions would mean that 2 million people—every one of them a basic rate taxpayer—would suffer a 9 per cent. increase in their marginal rate. They are the people in the middle income groups—the managers, scientists and young professionals —for whom the Labour party claim to speak. The man on one and one half times average earnings would see his national insurance bill increased by £7·60 per week.

All the Opposition's plans are based on the assumption that raising taxes will generate more revenue—but it may not. All our experience shows that cutting taxes from absurdly high rates generates more revenue. After we cut

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the top rates last year, we expected the top 5 per cent. of income taxpayers to contribute some 28 per cent. of revenue. This year, we expect them to contribute 29 per cent., and next year almost 30 per cent. That compares with 24 per cent. from the top 5 per cent. in 1979. The truth is that top-rate tax cuts have become a new and more effective way of clobbering the rich. *[Laughter.]* Experience shows that Labour Budgets soak the poor and that Conservative Budgets soak the rich. The difference is that, under the Conservatives, the rich can actually afford it.

Unfortunately, the Labour party has ceased to think about taxation. Tax-cutting is an essential part of the process of reversing this country's decline. That is why we stand by the tax cuts that we made last year, which are confirmed in this Bill for the first full year of operation. We believe in an incentive-led economy that will benefit rich and poor alike. It has worked in the past, it will work again, and it is the philosophy embodied in this Bill, which I commend to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 271, Noes 186.

Division No. 175] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard

Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time.

FINANCE BILL (COMMITTAL)

Ordered,

That clauses Nos. 1, 32, 33, 44, 51 and 138 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

That, when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Lawson.]*

Committee tomorrow.

Mines (Safety)

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House is about to discuss the Mines (Safety of Exit) Regulations 1988. The Health and Safety Commission is due to introduce a code of practice which sets out the regulations we are about to discuss together with guidance notes. I have been to the Vote Office and it appears that the code of practice and the guidance notes are not available to the House. The code of practice should be available to the House so that it can be discussed in conjunction with the regulations.

The Leader of the House will confirm that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments recently made representations to him, because no Committee or individual hon. Member, and now, apparently the House itself, can examine codes of practice which are issued in conjunction with regulations. That seems to be a serious omission and the code of practice should be made available to us.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Minister will respond to that as it is an out of time prayer.

10.17 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move,

That the Mines (Safety of Exit) Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 1729), dated 5th October 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November 1988, be revoked.

The House is well aware of the importance of mining safety regulations as compliance with them can sometimes mean the difference between life and death. They apply to one of our most dangerous industries, which is also one of the largest and most important industries in Britain.

The Minister will recall that during a recent debate on mine safety in the Standing Committee considering the Employment Bill I reaffirmed the Opposition's belief that the coal mining industry has a great long-term future as a producer of energy and chemical feedstocks. No matter how many pits are closed by the Government for short-term accountancy reasons, thousands of people will be working in our collieries long after North sea oil has run dry.

Against that background I have to tell the Government tonight that yesterday's announcement about Bilston Glen and Monktonhall collieries just outside Edinburgh is a piece of economic lunacy which we are determined to resist.

The exit regulations before the House tonight are the first legislative package in a programme of new law which is intended effectively to replace all the existing mine safety legislation, including the Mines and Quarries Act 1954, the Mines Management Act 1971 and a host of national and local regulations made under those and earlier Acts on mine safety.

Each package consists of a set of regulations and an approved code of practice. The regulations are made under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. This constitutes a fundamental break with earlier mine safety laws in that there is not to be a modern piece of primary legislation specific to mine safety, such as the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 or the Coal Mines (Regulations) Act 1908.

A second important break with the past is the use of codes of practice, which of course do not have the same force of law as a statutory instrument. The programme of new law is intended to consist of 16 packages. Each package will consist of a set of new regulations and an approved code of practice. The exit regulations set out the facilities and conditions necessary for safe exit to the surface, the action to be taken when only one exit is available and the emergency apparatus to be provided when all apparatus normally used for exit to the surface becomes unavailable.

The approved code of practice gives guidance on compliance with the regulations and sets out, for the first time in a code of practice, the best operating procedures when there is only one way out. As a senior executive of British Coal has been quoted as recently 8 March as saying that managers will not be required slavishly to follow the codes, I urge the Minister to make it clear that an approved code of practice must be fully implemented. What are the consequences of not doing so?

Why have the Government not brought forward a major new piece of primary legislation to replace the 1954 Act? Many of the 16 packages relate to each other and it is difficult to consider them in isolation. It is to the credit of the mining unions that during the negotiations they obtained an assurance that if a later package created a need to revise an earlier one, that would be done. Will the Minister confirm that?

It is hardly necessary for me to spell out to the House just how dangerous this industry is. The number of fatal accidents declined from 44 in 1982-83 to nine between 1988 and 1989. But last year the figure doubled to 18, and since 1 April 1989 there have already been two more fatalities.

The accident rates for the various industries are well set out in the latest annual report of the Health and Safety Executive, and the Minister will recall that only recently we had a major debate, at the initiative of the Opposition, on health and safety in the construction industry. I can bring home to hon. Members how dangerous coal mining is when I point out that the accident rates in mining are three times those for the construction industry.

In recent years we have seen a sharp fall in the number of mines and quarries inspectors. There has been a fall from 116 in 1979 to 72 in 1988. There can be no dispute as to the important role those inspectors play in health and safety in the mining industry.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Strang: I do not have time to give way, and in any case I will probably answer the question that the hon. Gentleman would have asked when I say that I accept that those figures must be set against the decline in manpower and the reduction in the number of pits. But most disturbing about the recent accident figures is the extent to which they are higher among private contractors working in British Coal collieries compared with direct employees of British Coal and, further, the extent to which accident rates among employees in the private licensed mines are higher still. For those reasons it is necessary to reverse the decline in the number of inspectors who watch over health and safety matters in the pits.

That reduction in the number of mines and quarries inspectors must be coupled with the proposals in the Management and Administration of Health and Safety in Mines Regulations, currently under discussion. That legislative package would abolish the office and functions of the pit deputy, who performs a vital role in the pits. His responsibilities include the immediate charge of workers in

the district and their operations. Deputies may also carry out inspections and duties in relation to the presence of gas, into ventilation, the support of roof and sides and matters of general safety as required by the Mines and Quarries Act. Perhaps most importantly, deputies must give preference to the securing of the safety and health of the workmen employed in the mine over the securing of any other matters. Winston Churchill, speaking during the Second Reading debate on the 1911 Coal Mines Bill, said:

"The deputies and firemen are the non-commissioned officers of the mining industry, and, just as the non-commissioned officers are said to be the backbone of the British Army, so the deputies and firemen are the essential foundations on which the safety and security of the mines mainly repose."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1911; Vol. 22 c. 2649.]

It is for that reason that I take the opportunity to tell the Minister that the administration package, as currently drafted, is utterly unacceptable to the Opposition. But we are, of course, debating the Mines (Safety of Exit) Regulations 1988 tonight. It has to be said that in recent years, Trades Union Congress representatives on the Health and Safety Commission and others involved with the commission have invested a substantial amount of effort in securing a legislative package which aims to maintain, if not improve, the existing law for the safe exit from mines. As a result of pressure from the mining unions, significant changes have been made to the draft regulations during the consultative process. The earlier drafts of the regulations contained, for example, no requirement that the minimum height of a roadway should be 5 ft 6 in or 1·7 m, as referred to in the regulations.

Having achieved those changes, the regulations are supported not only by the Trades Union Congress, but by the three mining unions. We recognise the amount of work involved in the regulations and the improvements that have been made, but we are conscious that there are many more packages to come before the House. We earnestly urge the Government to ensure not only that they consult fully on those packages, but that the packages increase health and safety standards rather than diminish them and that they come before the House, as this package does, with the support of the mining unions. On that basis, we will not seek to divide the House tonight.

10.27 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. John Cope): I apologise to the House that the code of practice was not in the Vote Office. It is in the Library, but I accept the criticism, although we are actually discussing the regulations. I want to set out briefly the background to the regulations and their contents, but I realise that many hon. Members want to speak, so I shall keep my remarks as brief as possible and then, if the House wishes, seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to respond to any points made in the course of the debate.

As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) said, mining is an inherently dangerous industry. However, the modern British mining industry is the safest in the world and that reflects the attention paid to safety over many years by all concerned. The current law is based on a royal commission report of 1938, whose recommendations formed the basis of the Mines and Quarries Act 1954. Since then, there have been major technological and other changes. There have been two more Acts of Parliament, 50 sets of general regulations and literally hundreds of local requirements and exemptions. It is time that all those were brought up to date and the regulations before us tonight start that process.

I was asked by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East why there was no new primary legislation in this area. The reason is that we believe that the primary legislation, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, should form the basis of health and safety legislation for mines and quarries, as for the rest of British industry.

Mr. Cryer: Part of the package involves the codes of practice. The Minister was here when I raised a point of order with Mr. Speaker about the lack of codes of practice in the Vote Office. I have been there again and the Minister has not arranged for any copies of the codes of practice to be placed in the Vote Office. That is a serious omission when we are debating the regulations, as a result of an Opposition initiative. The Government have not even troubled to lay a document before the House although, as I have emphasised, it will not be examined by any other body. Surely the document should be available.

Mr. Cope: The hon. Gentleman may not have been present when I dealt with that point earlier and explained that copies are in the Library. However, I accept the criticism, as I did earlier.

It is time that we modernised and revised the mass of existing legislation. The new basis for the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 in industry of all kinds could hardly have a more cross-party basis on which to start, or, for that matter, a more mines-oriented parentage. It was based on the Robens committee and work on the agreement started under a Labour Government, proceeded under the Conservative Government of 1970-74 and was enacted by the incoming Labour Government later in 1974.

The regulations are introduced on the basis of that Act. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said, this is the first of a series of regulations, 16 of which are planned, which will in due course supersede the existing law on mines and quarry safety.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): This is all about the privatisation of the pits. But is this the time, even for this Government, to be talking about relaxing safety laws when we have had so many accidents in industry, on the railways and at airports? Not satisfied with that, the Government want to relax the safety laws in the pits as well so that the privateers can make an easy killing. Is the Minister aware that the regulations are being introduced against a background of about a 130 per cent. increase in underground fires since the Government came into power? What kind of a Government would want to see more accidents in the pits?

Mr. Cope: In the first place, the regulations do not relax the safety requirements——

Mr. Skinner: I say they do.

Mr. Cope: They do not, and if they did they could not have been brought in under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act.

In the second place, no one has been killed or injured in a fire in a British mine for more than 20 years.

Mr. Skinner: There has been an increase in fires.

Mr. Cope: Although more fires have been detected and extinguished, for which better equipment exists, Britain's safety record on fires is extremely good. Besides the Government are not advancing the regulations alone. They have wide support——

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Is it not right to say that last year the number of underground fires fell to the lowest level for 10 years?

Mr. Cope: My hon. Friend probably is correct, but I am more concerned with safety and that is what was under criticism.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Does the Minister accept that over the years regulations have been brought to the House to enforce safety factors in mines and they exist because of pit accidents? However one dresses the package up, it is taking away some of the measures which in the past have made safety paramount. These regulations are taking us a stage backwards.

Mr. Cope: The regulations supersede some previous ones, but they seek to improve and build on them as I shall seek to show in a moment.

It is not only the Government who have evolved the regulations. Work started on this package more than five years ago in 1983. The mines and quarries inspectorate and its colleagues in the Health and Safety Executive prepared the first draft which was published for informal consultation in November 1984.

After six months' consultation with the unions, employers and others, the Health and Safety Executive worked out a revised draft which was put to the tripartite Health and Safety Commission. It approved it and released it for formal consultation in November 1985. There were further meetings with all concerned, as a result of which there was further consideration and amendment. But the commission was most anxious that the final proposals should be acceptable to all concerned. So the amended drafts were the subject of a third consultation, beginning in August 1986.

By November 1986 it seemed that there was agreement all round. But in December of that year, the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers and the National Union of Mineworkers withdrew agreement and the whole programme was thrown into doubt. As a result, the commission asked Mr. Ray Buckton, a former commissioner of health and safety, to chair a series of meetings with the unions to try to find agreement. Finally, in June 1988 the unions accepted the regulations and the related code of practice and, apparently too, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act formula of regulations supported by approved codes of practice. The way was then clear for the set of regulations before us to be approved by the commission, sent to the Secretary of State and laid before Parliament. They were laid before the House on 29 November last, to come into force on 1 April this year.

I have spelt out the background in order to make clear that the regulations are not based on Ministers' ideas primarily. They have not sprung out of our heads, nor have they been imposed upon the unions by management. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), may I point out that they far predate any talk of privatisation. They are based on legislation introduced by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), based on the recommendations of a committee chaired by a former Labour Member who was chairman of the National Coal Board. They have had five years of careful consultation with the unions and with others, and have been agreed and sent to Ministers by the tripartite Health and Safety Commission.

I am sure that all that consultation was worthwhile and necessary. I am not in any way criticising it or the amount of time that it has taken. On the contrary, as has already been stressed, it is important that there should be wide agreement on such a package of measures.

Above all, I stress again that the regulations improve safety standards. They are introduced under an Act which allows us to introduce them only if they maintain or improve standards of health and safety.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): When have they been improved?

Mr. Cope: I am coming to that. The main thing that the regulations do is to bring together and clarify the existing provisions. They rearrange them into regulations and an approved code of practice. They tighten some of the provisions. I shall give some examples. They extend the requirement for two separate exits from coal mines to all other mines—an important provision. They set a minimum height of 1·7 m for all roadways, irrespective of who uses them or when they were constructed. They reduce from 100 to 50 the number of people permitted where there is only one air intake. They clarify the requirement that normally only nine people may work in places where there is only one exit, restrict the scope for exemptions that are granted at the moment and provide extra safeguards where there are more than nine people. They also require action plans from management, emergency equipment and so on.

I explained that some of the provisions are in regulations and some in approved codes of practice. I was asked about the approved codes of practice. The formula of having codes of practice and regulations derives from Robens and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act. In the rest of industry it has worked well over the years since its introduction.

An approved code of practice has legal backing in that if an employer does not follow the practice set out in the approved code of practice, and if legal proceedings result, he has to prove in court that the regulations were complied with in some other way. This allows for the different circumstances in different pits, and so on.

Failure to follow approved codes of practice may be taken by a court in criminal proceedings as proof that a person has contravened the regulations or the section of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to which the provision relates. It is prima facie evidence in court and that is the extent of the legal backing that it has.

There are, of course, many informal British Coal codes of practice in use in coal mines at the moment, as well as other managers' rules, and so on, which are also provided for in some of these regulations.

All in all, these regulations are an important step forward not only in what they do but even more because they are the first steps in a renewal of all our law and regulations on the safety of mines and quarries. They have been, as I have spelt out at some length, painstakingly agreed by all concerned. I commend them to the House and believe that they should have the support of all parties.

[Mr. Cope]

10.40 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): The Minister is an experienced parliamentarian and he will gather that there is a measure of suspicion, if not hostility, on the Opposition Benches when we discuss the question of safety. I am hardly very well disposed to the Minister because yesterday two pits in my constituency closed after 800 years of mining because of over-production and because there is no sale for the product.

This is a significant debate for us tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) has said that the exit regulations now before us are a forerunner of what has been described as a package of new law which replaces all the existing mine safety legislation, including the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and the Mines Management Act 1971, and a whole host of national and local regulations under earlier Acts on mine safety.

The Minister must explain to us the proper definition of an approved code of practice. It might have been helpful if, as mentioned in the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), we had had the necessary documentation before us. I ask the Minister if the men's representatives will have the opportunity to approve codes of practice before they are put before Parliament. He retailed to us a long discussion that had taken place with TUC representatives. Since he has told us that we are about to embark on a whole cycle of new regulations, we want to know what the position will be with regard to consultations with the representatives of the mining unions.

It has been stated that the regulations are made under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, but this action constitutes a fundamental break with earlier mine safety laws, and there is not to be a modern piece of primary legislation on mine safety like the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and so on. It is all very well to modernise and we would never object to modernisation, but it has to be demonstrated to us that these codes of practice, these packages, will be beneficial to safety in the mines. So I put it to the Minister—and we will have to be persuaded otherwise—that this is an important break with the past in the use of codes of practice.

It may be my fault, but I was not really persuaded about the force of law in relation to these regulations. We want to know about the force of law for parliamentary purposes in the case, say, of statutory instruments. The Minister must clarify that very important legal point tonight. What legal standing do the regulations have? The Minister must bear in mind the statement made by an official from British Coal. I recorded the official's exact words. He said:

"British Coal do not intend to carry out slavishly codes of practice."

It is important that that statement is clarified tonight. It is no good Parliament being involved in discussion, argument or debate if a senior executive at British Coal says that British Coal will not slavishly follow legislation, codes of practice or whatever else Parliament wants to define.

I was involved in the discussions about merging the mines inspectorate with the proposed Health and Safety Commission. If you were more free, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you would want to put in your pennyworth, although we might not agree. You were involved in this matter as well.

There were extreme doubts about the wisdom of the merger and I was one of the doubters. Would the authority, experience and independence of the mining inspectorate be undermined as a consequence of merging with the new commission? If it had been put to us that the method before us tonight was the way to deal with mine safety, would the industry and mining unions have agreed to sink their identity? I do not think that they would have.

One compromise was reached. There is a minute to the effect that in matters of mining safety the sponsoring Department—the Department of Energy—would be involved in full consultations. My hon. Friends and I in the miners' parliamentary group want to know, as do my colleagues who represent constituencies with powerful mining interests, whether the Department of Energy was involved in full consultations. The minute states that it had to be involved. What input has the Department made to the proposals before us?

The exit regulations are important because they set out the facilities and conditions necessary for safe exit to the surface and the action to be taken when only one exit is available. In my mining experience, which lasted more than 30 years, I had to lead men up an exit when the main shaft was blocked. I have led men up stair pits. I can assure the Minister that climbing a stair pit to the surface is not a pleasant task when the main shaft is blocked, particularly for men who have not done it before. I had plenty of experience because I was a workmen's inspector. It was part of my job to inspect those exits and also to climb them five or six times a year. Is there any change in the regulations concerning the authority, stature and influence of workmen's inspectors? Are there any new powers vested in them in the regulations? We hope that their powers have not been diminished. The Minister must say whether they have any additional powers and whether their existing powers are to be maintained.

Some of us were concerned to find that there was to be no minimum height for roadways. It was only due to pressure from the mining unions that a maximum height for a normal roadway of not less than 5 ft. 6 in. became a requirement. The day should be past when miners have to walk like half-shut knives when making their way to an exit. The powers that be should be told by Parliament that we are disappointed that this had to drawn to their attention when it was an aspect that had long been under discussion.

The history of the coal industry has a record of blood in the coal. Too often miners have had to weep, bury their dead and generally grasp whatever comfort they could from their Churches and relatives. Mining safety is important. There was an increase in mining fatalities last year. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East said, it is distressing that the statistics for accidents in private mines are much higher than those in British Coal mines.

If there are plans for the privatisation of the coal industry, Parliament must be eternally vigilant when any mining safety regulations come before it. It will have to know whether the regulations are legally enforceable, and whether those administering, running and managing the mines can afford to ignore rather than follow slavishly codes of practice.

We shall not regard these regulations, or any other regulations on mine safety, with complacency. I believe that my view reflects that of my hon. Friends. We shall scrutinise with utmost care any such measures that the Government bring before the House.

10.53 pm

* **Mr. Andy Stewart** (Sherwood): I have not had the privilege of working in the mining industry, unlike a number of Opposition Members, in particular the hon. Member for East Lothian—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie)—his constituency is next door, so why worry. However, I have lived all my life in coal field areas, the first 23 years in Scotland and the past 28 in Nottinghamshire, During that time, I have learnt that nothing surpasses safety in the coal industry.

I can vividly recall the disaster in Ayrshire in the 1950s, when the community was bereaved like the families in Liverpool today. The recommendations from the report of that disaster and others from across the British coal fields have made working in the industry safer. During the past 10 years there has been a major reduction in accidents in Britain's coal industry. The rate for all accidents for every 100,000 manshifts worked has fallen by two thirds, from 94·6 in 1978-79 to 29·3 in 1988-89.

Those figures belie the allegations made last year, and repeated recently by the Labour research department, that pit accidents were rising. The British coal industry has an unrivalled international reputation for its standards of safety and health. Accident prevention is the top priority of all miners and management throughout the industry —their lives depend on it. The Mines (Safety of Exit) Regulations strengthen the law, particularly by having to keep the nominated person informed. In the Nottinghamshire coal field that will usually be the Union of Democratic Mineworkers' branch secretary. The new regulations bring into line what is now practice under exemptions from the existing Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and regulations. In other respects there is no change.

While the overall safety record has improved owing to a combination of determined efforts by those who work in the industry, it is to everyone's regret that fatalities increased to 18 during 1988-89, compared with 15 in 1986-87 and nine—the lowest number ever—in 1987-88. In an attempt to achieve what we must all see as our goal, a zero fatality figure, the coal industry's safety campaign activities this year involve everyone in the collieries concentrating on preventing fatal and major injuries.

No better example could be produced than the safety-conscious miners of Clipstone colliery, in my constituency, who have won the national underground safety competition for the second time in three years. If their best were the national norm, and given the new regulations, mining would be a safer industry in which to work.

10.55 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I spent the major part of my working life in the mining industry, protected by and complying with the various Acts and regulations governing safety in the mines. I cite especially the Mines and Quarries Act 1954, but I was in the industry even before the advent of that Act. I remember when I was governed by the Coal Mines Act 1911.

I am particularly interested in the 16 new regulations. If there is one major flaw in our approach to them, it is our method of dealing with each regulation separately. They are not a package, and if we are to look at them at all that is how we should view them. They are all inter-related: safety of exit relates to electricity regulations, mechanical regulations, ventilatory regulations, and so forth. I hope that the Minister will give us an assurance that when all 16 have been examined we can examine them again, noting that the flaws in one may relate to another.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) rightly pointed out that many existing safety regulations had evolved from accidents and disasters, both large and small, some causing heavy loss of life. Let me give an example that relates specifically to safety of exit. More than 100 years ago, in my county of Northumberland, the New Hartley mine had only one shaft—circumstances that prevailed at the time. Ventilation was provided by a furnace at the shaft bottom, which pulled the air up and allowed cool air to come down. At the top of the shaft was a beam pump operated by steam: this was used to extract water from the mine. While the beam pump was operating, the beam snapped. It went down the single shaft and sealed it off, trapping all the men and boys—some only eight years old. Literally hundreds died. As a result of that accident, from then on mines were expected to have at least two shafts—a significant development.

I am sure that those who draft and redraft mining legislation will have read the poignant stories of New Hartley and, for instance, Cresswell colliery, where a disaster involving the burning of conveyor belting led to new regulations being introduced. No doubt they have studied the reports produced at the time, and the horrendous stories relating to such accidents. Such events must be at the forefront of their minds when they draw up safety regulations such as these.

It has become apparent that the foundation of the present legislation has prevented many more deaths and serious occurrences. Changes are acceptable only if they will improve safety standards. Any legislation that lowers standards would and should be opposed.

The mining industry is claimed to be the safest in the world, as the Minister said himself. I do not dispute that claim. I hope that these regulations will uphold that reputation, but there is a financial price to pay. The British miners have shown that, despite the high cost of safety, they will always produce a relatively high standard.

My role in the industry was in electrical engineering. While I had responsibilities for high standards of safety in electrical equipment upon which other miners depended, they, in their turn, were responsible for protecting my safety by ensuring that other equipment such as ventilation, roof supports, and roadways were secure and that the beams of the work place were safe.

In electrical engineering, standards and quality of equipment have improved dramatically in recent years. I have seen changes that I would not have believed possible when I entered the industry. These improvements have continued since I left the industry. So in all aspects improvements have taken place; always in a nationalised industry safety came first.

I am concerned that this set of regulations does not reduce the safety aspects of leaving a work place or mine in circumstances that are potentially dangerous. I shall give a personal example. Before I left my place of

[Mr. Jack Thompson]

employment in the mining industry—and I lived in Corrie—a new system of drawing men up the shaft was introduced. In fact, we did not have the normal procedure of a winch pulling a cage but a lift such as is in the Savoy hotel, believe it or not, although not quite up to that plush standard. However, it operated on the same principles. My responsibility as an engineer was, on occasion, to make sure the lift was working satisfactorily. When it did not work but broke down and stuck half way—this happens in the Savoy sometimes as well—with miners inside it was usually when they were coming out for a pint of beer on a Friday night. On such occasions I had to go to that lift and introduce a standby system which actually defeated some of the safety systems on the lift. I hope that the regulations prevent that sort of thing happening as standard practice. I hope that it will become part of the code of practice that that sort of equipment be protected.

The only real improvement I can detect is a small change in the language to be used in the drafting of regulations. In Schedule 2 (b) which refers to regulation 20 relating to a deputy's duty to be acquainted with ways leading to exits the words

"of egress therefrom or from any place therein"

are replaced by

"each leading to a different exit."

Later there is a further simplification. The words

"After 'from the district' for 'and from any such place'"

are far more understandable expressed as

"and from every place where a person works."

I quote those two small examples to emphasise that miners are more used to using simple, clear and sometimes colourful language and not the pseudo-legal language often used in drafting Acts and regulations governing their lives and safety. That is all that I can really identify as an important change to the regulations.

In general I can see these regulations having a more significant effect upon people operating small private mines whose resources and enthusiasm for safety standards are somewhat limited. Many of the proposals included are already standard practice in British Coal mines, including internal codes of practice.

I am rather puzzled that in these regulations reference is made to the role of deputies. I would appreciate a comment from the Minister as to whether proposals will be laid before the House to alter both the title of the official and his important role. He is the principal officer responsible for on-site safety. If that is to happen, then this document before us should take that change into account. If the regulation is to change the role of the deputy, it should be the first to be considered. Any diminution of the role of the deputy will affect safety standards and the application of these regulations. In my long experience in the industry the deputy was the on-site safety officer for general safety standards. He was supported by skilled craftsmen with responsibility for the machinery's safety. If the deputy's responsibilities are reduced and shifted further up the management hierarchy, many of the regulations will be seriously affected in their application.

I understand that the mining unions have been consulted, and that they made valuable suggestions for changes that have been incorporated in the regulations. I welcome the unions' participation because they know as much as anyone about mining safety. I shall be interested to learn their views on future proposals.

This package of 16 regulations can have a significant effect on the industry's future, for better or for worse. I hope that they will be for the better.

11.5 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I trust that brevity will not detract from the serious nature of the remarks that I shall make. As the House knows, I am sponsored by the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, and reference has already been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and by others to NACODS' serious concern about the regulations. NACODS has an enormous interest in the regulations and in the others that will follow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) referred to the association's concern. The House should be aware that the duties, experience, training and qualifications of the underground official reflect and provide for safety as well as for the pursuit of production. Will the Minister confirm that under the law as it was, or is, the priority of production was subordinate to that of safety? The anxiety felt about the regulations basically stems from concern as to whether production will command a greater priority than it has. It is in that regard—the additional risk to life and limb—that concern is most strongly felt.

I suspect, as do many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that there are people who, especially with the prospect of private profit, wish to weaken the structure of and priority given to safety. I hope that I am wrong. However, confusion seems to exist in the mind of British Coal. When the Select Committee considered the matter in 1985-86—as my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) will confirm—Sir Robert Haslam seemed to suggest that substantial changes to legislation were necessary. In the light of the Minister's comments about 1983, Sir Robert's remarks were consistent.

It appears that when Sir Robert made that point senior British Coal officials present indicated dissent. Mr. Moses stated—he repeated this comment in response to questioning by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford—that the only changes he wanted to see were changes in the Hours of Work Act 1908. He stressed that there was no need to amend regulations. According to the Minister, that was three years after the proceedings began. I believe that Sir Robert was honest with the Select Committee, but there seems to have been some inconsistency.

The first package was reluctantly accepted by NACODS, for two reasons. Originally there was no minimum height proposal. Given the political situation and the mood in the industry at the time, I suppose it was felt to be a triumph to reach agreement on an exit height of 1·7 m. That is less than my height, but I suppose the unions felt relieved that miners would not always be required to crawl. No doubt there are those on the Government Benches and in Hobart house who would be happy if they were made to crawl.

NACODS was assured—and I ask the Minister to comment on this—and it was promised that if it agreed, and if other parts of further packages were unacceptable, the association could return to the first package. Will the Minister confirm that such a promise was made? I feel some anxiety about whether that promise can be fulfilled.

The Minister acknowledges that there have been months of deliberation, months of argument, and months in which the unions, the inspectorate and others involved, including officials of the Department, gave serious thought and consideration to the regulations. At a meeting of the Mining Qualifications Board—this has been referred to already, so the Minister will have to comment on it—there was a discussion about whether the candidates for mining engineering qualifications should have access to works of reference during the examination. Mr. Moses said—and I am quoting again, but I shall complete the quotation because, so far, it has not been completed—

"My managers will not slavishly follow the code of practice".

He went on to say:

"I will send out instructions that will supersede these codes."

The Minister must understand that such a statement from such a principal person—the technical director of the British coal industry—justifies the concern of this House. Is privatisation such a god that proper regard for democratic and constitutional procedure can be set at naught? The Minister must answer that point. I do not know whether Mr. Moses has any explanation to offer, but, if not, the Minister has a duty to offer one.

I suspect that the sort of attitude that is still to be found in the industry concerns the commitment to produce regardless of the consideration of safety. There is only one pit left in my constituency. It is a successful pit with good men and good management. But throughout my area there has been mining for generations. Indeed, people from three generations of my family were underground officials. The history of my area, as in the case of Northumberland and the other coalfields, is riddled with example after example of the priority and predominance of production. There have been series of accidents where the dominance of production has been the major factor in the loss of life. We are worried—very worried indeed—that the priorities are now about to shift.

Reference has been made to accident rates. Last week, in this building, there was a press conference concerned with mine safety. Concern was expressed about the increased incidence of major accidents and major injuries. British Coal was far quicker off the mark in replying to that than it had been in advising people seeking to defend the coal industry during the proceedings on the Electricity Bill. It was far quicker off the mark than it had been in advising or helping us in seeking to defend the coal industry against the development of Humber ports to import South African coal.

On the very day on which that press conference was held British Coal issued another statement suggesting that there were fewer accidents. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) may have forgotten that, as a result of the implementation of the bonus scheme, men are much more reluctant to report minor accidents. But major accidents cannot be disguised, and the number of major accidents and major incidents is increasing.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Before leaving that point, would my hon. Friend comment on the fact that the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 made it more difficult to compare like with like on either side of the date of implementation?

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is quite right. The implication is that there will have to be further debates when other regulations are considered.

There are those concerned with the coal industry who will be looking longingly at the coal industry in America. I have visited American pits, and I know that there are safe ones, but there are also dangerous ones, and my anxiety is that in the unfolding situation in the British coal industry we will see the dangerous ones rather than the better ones emulated. Those anxieties need to be allayed, otherwise the Minister will run the risk of being charged with putting a cover round those who are rather reckless in their attitude to the coal industry.

11.13 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I shall be very brief, as I know that several other hon. Members wish to speak.

Having read the regulations and listened to the speeches from the two Front Benches, I was satisfied that, in these regulations, we had achieved a reasonably fair balance, with a wide measure of acceptability across the political spectrum. Having listened to some of the comments that have been made since then, however, I think that it is important to probe the original speeches a little to see whether points of substance have been raised or whether what we have been hearing is unnecessary scaremongering for those listening to, or reading the report of, our debate.

Anybody who has been down a pit recognises that those who spend their working lives underground are uniquely vulnerable. I have been down pits in many parts of the country. The experience of hon. Members on both sides of the House of the mining industry and the representations that were made when the regulations were being drafted have to be borne in mind.

If the regulations are to be accepted, high standards of maintenance and enhanced safety must come first. I seek my hon. Friend's assurance that safety will be put first. Notwithstanding the carping criticism in the debate, I hope that that clear message will be given.

Apart from maintaining and enhancing the high standards of safety, will my hon. Friend confirm that the regulations will have firm statutory force and that they will apply both to British Coal and to the private sector, whatever their future status in relation to each other may be? Will he also confirm that the codes of practice will be made more easily comprehensible so that specific problems can be tackled as they arise? Will my hon. Friend confirm that the regulations enjoy the support of both management and all the unions in the industry? If the unions as well as the management support the regulations, the Opposition's criticisms have gone well beyond the views of the union's negotiators who participated in the preparation of the regulations.

If, as a consequence of subsequent parts of the package, questions arise about the safety of exits, can my hon. Friend assure the House that the matter will be looked at again? I hope that my hon. Friend will give firm assurances about all these questions. If, as I believe, his answer to all of them is yes, the regulations should receive not just the approval of the House but a very warm welcome.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I can see five hon. Members who are trying to catch my eye. I

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

understand that the debate must end by 11.47. I am sure that the House will want to leave time for the Minister to comment on some of the matters that have been raised.

11.18 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): The regulations will lead to a fundamental break with the safety legislation. Is that necessary? The safety regulations should be strengthened, if a case can be made out for doing so. My experience of the mining industry goes back over many years, both as a face worker and as a member of the management team. The regulations will not strengthen the safety laws. They will be diluted.

The regulations will lead to a move away from a statutory obligation to a code of conduct.

Mr. Cope *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Lofthouse: The Minister shakes his head. No doubt he will put me right later, but that is how it appears to me. If that is the case, that is dilution of the present regulations.

I make a further point as regards egress. There was reference earlier to egress from the winding shafts, but there are other forms of egress from headings with just one way in and one way out. As I understand the regulations here, the current situation is that where a manager requires more than nine men, plus any other workers such as deputies, to work in a heading of that nature, he must get Her Majesty's inspectors' authorisation before he can increase that number. As I understand this regulation, that will not now be necessary and the manager will be able to decide for himself. If that is the case, that is diluting the present regulations.

I hope the Minister will take full note that, after a long investigation into the future of the mining industry by the Energy Select Committee in 1986, it took evidence from those we expected to be experts. The evidence given to us at that time was that it would not be necessary for any alterations at all to the regulations apart from the working hours. Mr. Kenneth Moses, who has been referred to earlier this evening, who made a speech to the Mines Qualifications Board on 18 March, I understand, will not expect his managers slavishly to carry out the codes of conduct. During the investigation I personally put a question to Sir Robert Haslam. For the benefit of the House I will quote:

"Are you aware that many of the elements of this new strategy assume the deregulation of the coal industry and coal mines legislation will have to be amended and diluted?"

The strategy referred to was the mechanisation of the British industry as recommended by Mr. Albert Wheeler. Sir Robert replied:

"We realise that to bring about the kind of changes Mr. Wheeler is outlining, there would have to be quite radical changes in legislation, yes."

At that moment I noticed some of the witnesses with Sir Robert that morning shaking their heads, so I put a further question:

"I notice a shaking of the heads there. In other words, some of the witnesses are not agreeing with what you are saying, Sir Robert. Can you indicate in your view or any of your officials' view, which specific regulations and which piece of legislation you think will be required as an amendment, so that the Wheeler plan can be implemented?"

The same Mr. Moses who was saying that he did not expect his managers slavishly to carry out the code gave this answer:

"There is only one piece of legislation that would require any amendment to carry out Mr. Wheeler's plan, and that is the Hours of Work Act 1908 which limits the amount of time a man can spend underground in a normal shift. There will be no requirement to amend the Mines and Quarries Act; there will be no requirement to amend any safety legislation whatsover."

Mr. Moses goes on to say in 10.19:

"What I am saying is that if you take all the elements of Mr. Wheeler's suggestions which might be implemented to improve the performance of pits, there is no requirement to amend either the Mines and Quarries Act or any orders and regulations made under the Mines and Quarries Act, the Health and Safety Act or any orders made under the Health and Safety Act to enable any of these suggestions to be carried out. There is a requirement to amend the Hours of Work Act 1908."

There was then a further question from me:

"Will there be no pressure from the Coal Board to do so?"

Mr. Moses: "No."

Mr. Illsley: Far be it for me to defend Mr. Moses, but what he might have been saying was technically correct. There is no intention to amend the Mines and Quarries Act 1954. According to the written reply I have dated 27 May 1988 from the Department,

"The intention is to replace the Mines and Quarries Act 1954"—[*Official Report*, 20 May 1988; Vol. 133, c. *613*.]

Not amend it, but simply to do away with it altogether.

Mr. Lofthouse: I fully appreciate that point. Mr. Moses, in his senior position in British Coal, was deceiving the Energy Select Committee because the Minister has told us tonight that discussions and negotiations were taking place two years before Mr. Moses gave evidence to the Select Committee. Mr. Moses must have known that. If Mr. Moses, the technical director of British Coal and a mining expert, could tell the Select Committee that there was no reason whatsoever why the regulations would need to be changed, why are they being changed? We can only conclude that it is in preparation for privatisation. When the other 15 regulations are produced—it is a pity they are not before us tonight—I am sure that they will represent a continued dilution of the safety laws in the mining industry. People who worked in the mining industry prior to its nationalisation know what that means.

I am not convinced that the true and honest motive behind the regulations is simply to strengthen the safety laws. I believe that they are in preparation for privatisation.

I stress that the regulation that gives the manager the sole right to decide how many men go in a heading is extremely dangerous. The mining industry has already started operating the American system. Many of the headings have only one entrance and the roofs are supported only by roof bolts. That creates added danger. If hon. Members want confirmation of that, they should read the evidence of Her Majesty's chief inspector of mines to the Select Committee. He said that roof bolting alone was not satisfactory for United Kingdom mines. That practice is taking place in headings with only one entrance and one exit, putting men in danger. Yet the regulations will allow the manager to decide to increase the number of men from nine to 18 without the permission of Her Majesty's inspectorate. That is diluting the regulations.

I am sorry that we have decided not to vote against the regulations as I believe that they are a retrograde step for the safety of mines in Britain.

11.27 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I shall detain the House for only a few minutes. I have some sympathy with the Minister in dealing with the regulations. There is an old saying, "To know me, come and live with me". To know what makes the industry tick, and why it ticks, it is necessary to spend a considerable time in the industry. I listened to the Minister's opening speech with great care, but I was not convinced. Perhaps when he replies to the debate he will convince me that the regulation is a good thing.

The Minister talked about consultation, but one does not consult with the management of British Coal. If one does not accept what they say they will not play ball—they simply take the bat and ball away. We met the British Coal board the other day, and I have yet to meet a more arrogant and conceited group of individuals.

If we refer to the Mines and Quarries Act, we get back to the old theme that regulations need to be enforced. If miners object to discrepancies and complain that managers are failing to comply with mines and quarries regulations, they are classed as troublemakers and are forced out of the industry. For proof of that we need only talk to the men who have experienced these problems.

It is all very well to talk about safety practices, but they go by the board when British Coal wants to see increased production coming up the shaft. There is a danger that British Coal is getting shot of men and threatening men who dare to question the integrity of the mines and quarries safety practices.

The Minister assured us that the regulations would have legal backing. I urge him to speak to present and former mines and quarries inspectors about provisions having legal backing. He might then take a different view about such matters having the force of law.

Is the Minister aware that a reduction in the roadway height must have an effect on ventilation? I am not a mining engineer, but I assure the Minister that the domino theory comes into effect because, once one section is interfered with, there is bound to be a knock-on effect. The Health and Safety Executive will have the right to disregard any of the regulations if it claims that in doing so it is meeting a British Coal request.

I hope that the Minister will do more to convince me of the need for the regulations, because I cannot, from what he has said so far, consider them to be beneficial for the future of the coal industry.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal for very brief speeches, please.

11.32 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I worked underground for 20 years as an electrical engineer and 13 years as an industrial relations officer. During the time I was underground I was president of the NUM at my colliery and I was a No. 1, 2 and 3 inspector at that colliery. Hon. Members will understand, therefore, that I take a great interest in the health and safety regulations applying to mining.

I was fined on two occasions for breaking the then existing regulations, once by the manager and once by the inspector, and on each occasion they shoved across the table to me the document containing the rules and regulations—the bible, as we called it—and said, "That is what you have broken. It is a statutory responsibility."

I mention that experience to show that, while the Minister may talk about the regulations and the approved code of practice having legal status—that they could be used in court—he must realise that all of that will apply after the event. A code of practice is precisely that—a guide, a code than can be altered by the mine management, by British Coal—and I do not think it need return to this House to be altered. It must be done in consultation, but it need not return to Parliament. When a matter arrives in court, there will have been an accident. That will be the only time that a code of practice will be tested legally. Can the president of the NUM or a representative of any other trade union take a manager to court, not because there has been an accident but because the code of practice has been broken?

In view of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), may we have an assurance that, should problems occur with any of the other packages under this set of regulations, we will be able to return to the issue? The Minister said that there was little difference between what my hon. Friend sought and what was proposed. What precisely is the difference?

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth spoke about fast headings. I worked under private enterprise in the mines, from non-mechanisation to mechanisation, and I saw the rules and regulations altered to suit the new conditions as bigger machinery was installed. I suggest that to have 18 men in a fast heading is too many in view of the size of the machinery that is now in use.

A recent newspaper article said:

"British Coal is lobbying the Government to hasten measures which could radically alter the way the industry is run. The corporation wants speedy changes in health and safety legislation in order to clear the way for new working practices to increase efficiency."

It went on:

"they are reluctant to see definite instructions on safety"—referring to the unions—

"replaced with broader recommendations. As one union official said, they do want to see 'shall' replaced with 'as far as is reasonably practicable.'"

Regulation 3(1)(b) states:

"the shafts or outlets are so separated that as far as is practicable".

Regulation 3(2) states:

"The manager shall ensure that, so far as is practicable".

Regulation 8(2) states:

"The person for the time being in charge of that part of the mine shall ensure that any such barrier or enclosure is properly maintained and kept in position."

However, the original regulation has been altered, because the word "deputy" has now been left out. This is the beginning of doing away with the safety representatives in the collieries—the deputies. We can see that in black and white. The word "deputy" has been taken out and that has left the manager able to put someone in charge other than the person who has been in charge of safety for every minute that the colliery has been open. Those are changes that are taking place.

The changes have been accepted and we shall not vote on them, but we have made the points that should have been made. Some points cannot be answered, because the

[Mr. Allen McKay]

real answers are here in black and white. We shall look carefully at the regulations as they come into effect. We want the assurance that we shall be able to come back to the original regulations if we find anything untoward in the new ones.

11.36 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I will confine my remarks to the important issue of the number of men allowed in a heading where there is no separate means of exit. As the Minister will know, the regulations refer not to "men", but to "persons" because it is proposed in the Employment Bill to allow women to work in the pits and to place them in circumstances in which they could be blocked in a heading.

Before 1 April, when the present regulations came into force, the law on numbers in a non-exit heading was contained in section 24 of the Mines and Quarries Act 1954. It allowed only nine men in a heading where there was no separate exit, other than in exceptional circumstances under a notice issued by an inspector. Exemption certificates were issued carefully and only ever for small numbers of people. There is seldom a need to operate with more than nine men in a heading. Why is the law now being changed?

The new regulations allow nine men, or persons, into those headings, plus three others engaged temporarily in inspection, investigation, measurement or sampling. But how long is "temporarily"? The code of practice from the Health and Safety Commission, which operates in association with the regulations, explains that for us. Section 31 states that it is:

"to allow such persons as managers, mining and engineering supervisory staff, inspectors, workpeople's inspectors and surveyors to enter the heading."

For how long? The code of practice states:

"for as long as is necessary to do their work."

In other words, "temporary" will be for as long as it takes.

The manager can now decide to have 18 persons in such a heading provided he fulfils certain conditions and notifies the inspector of mines and quarries for the district. Sections 32 and 33 of the code of practice are headed:

"Managers' rules where more than nine persons are employed in headings."

But it should not be managers who rule. It should be the inspectors, as under past law, custom and practice, who make the decisions. Managers will be subject to increasing commercial pressures with the electricity privatisation and competing floods of coal imports coming through the Humber ports. They should not be expected to balance safety considerations against a push for increased productivity. The two functions should be undertaken by different people.

The dangers of working in a heading are shown by the events at 91s main gate at 10.30 am on Friday 13 January at High Moor pit in my constituency. They occurred under the Mines and Quarries Act, but illustrate the need to change the current regulations and the code. I shall paraphrase the report of the inquiry by A. Ingham, the chief mining engineer, and I hope that I do not distort his work unfairly.

High Moor is in the South Yorkshire area of British Coal. At approximately 10.30 am on Friday 13 January this year, 30 m. of roof collapsed between 210 m. and 240 m. into what is in effect a tunnel 990 m. long. Ten men, one over the nine, were trapped inside.

The inquiry pointed out that the accident was due not to any geological factors or to other seam operations, but to the fact that the girders were too far away from the roadway so that it was not correctly protected. When the fall took place the girders collapsed with a domino effect leaving people blocked inside.

The report contained a set of recommendations and I hope that they will be included in any future revision of these measures in order to ensure proper safety within roadways.

Mr. Cope *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I take it that the Minister has the leave of the House to speak again.

11.41 pm

Mr. Cope: I shall do my best to respond to as many points as possible, but I thought it better to give one or two more hon. Members the opportunity to speak. I shall respond in writing to those whose points I do not touch on in the remaining few minutes.

First, let me do my best to try to reassure hon. Members about the origins of the legislation and of codes of practice. The legal reason for the introduction of codes of practice goes back to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, introduced by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) against the background that I described.

Section 1 of that Act says:

"shall in particular have effect with a view to enabling the enactment specified in the third column of Schedule 1 and the regulations, orders and other instruments in force under those enactments to be progressively replaced by a system of regulations and approved codes of practice operating in combination with other provisions of this Part".

One of the Acts of Parliament mentioned in the schedule referred to is the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and the other Acts that have been replaced by regulations under that. Therefore, the origin of all this is the Robens committee and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 passed by a Labour Government. The Health and Safety Commission put that provision into effect.

Several hon. Members have asked about the legal position of approved codes of practice. Failure to observe any provisions of an approved code of practice is prima facie evidence of a breach of statutory duty. The onus of proof is on the accused, British Coal or whoever, to prove that the law has been complied with. That is a strong measure which will be influential.

I was asked by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) whether somebody could be taken to court for breach of the code of practice. Certainly. The regulations must be complied with. If somebody fails to follow the code of practice, he is, prima facie, likely to be in breach of the regulations. Breach of the code of practice is evidence of the breach of the regulations, unless those regulations are shown to have been met in some other way.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Cope: I have many points to answer. I shall try to deal with all the questions that I have been asked.

I was asked by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) whether the Department of Energy was involved in the consultations. It was. He also asked whether

workmen's inspections were affected by the regulations. They are not. They will remain as the hon. Gentleman has known them from his personal experience.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) thought, like others, that all 16 regulations should be in a single package. The decision was made by the Health and Safety Commission; it was not decided by me or any other Minister. I think that it is a help that the consultations should proceed separately on different parts. The consultations will be interlinked and we may have to refer back to the regulations and to the code of practice later. The other parts of the package will have to be examined in the light of these regulations.

A senior British Coal official made a statement recently about the code of practice. I want to make it absolutely clear that neither British Coal nor any other mine owner can choose whether to comply with the law or with the regulations. I have explained that prosecution can follow breaches of the regulations. Mine owners will have to satisfy the courts that their chosen methods meet the regulations. So British Coal is not and should not be above the law.

Several hon. Members referred to the arrangements for nine men working in a heading. The position is that inspectors frequently granted exemptions from the provisions of the old law when more than nine men were to work in a single entry blind heading. Under the new regulations a mine manager must notify us——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to order [21 April]:*

The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 95.

Division No. 176] **[11.47 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cryer, Bob
Galbraith, Sam
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maxton, John
Nellist, Dave
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Salmond, Alex
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Martin Redmond.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Fallon, Michael
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Freeman, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayward, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Raffan, Keith
Ryder, Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Community Charge (Isle of Cumbrae)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

11.58 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The poll tax legislation has given rise to much injustice, many anomalies and some cruelties. I do not suggest that the aspect upon which I am concentrating tonight is by any means the most damaging consequence of the introduction of the poll tax. My deepest concern is, and will remain, for those low income families for whom a second home of any kind is but a distant dream and who have enough trouble keeping one roof over their heads in part because of the poll tax.

I raise the question of the standard community charge and its specific impact on the Isle of Cumbrae because that is a constituency issue of considerable importance. A serious injustice is involved, and there are wider implications. There is an easy remedy which the Govermment should be able to accommodate without loss of ideological face. I hope that by raising this debate on the Adjournment tonight I shall finally encourage them to contemplate that remedy.

The Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 does not allow local authorities to vary the standard community charge on second homes within their own boundaries. The legislation allows each authority to set a multiplier of between one and two on the personal community charge in order to arrive at the standard community charge. In the case of Cunninghame district and Strathclyde taken in conjunction, the personal community charge is £278. Therefore, a multiplier of two means a standard community charge of £556 per property.

If I may pre-empt what I confidently expect to be the Minister's reply, I suspect that he will inform the House that it would have been open to Strathclyde and Cunninghame to set their standard community charges at a multiplier of one, thereby halving the burden on the owners of second homes. However, if he does so, the Minister will know that he is being disingenuous. More important, everyone with a specific interest in the Isle of Cumbrae who learns of this debate will know, for at least two very good reasons, that he is being disingenuous.

One of those who will know that the Minister is being disingenuous is the former Member of Parliament for Cunninghame, North, who raised this matter in similar terms in Committee when the Bill to abolish domestic rates was being debated in the previous Session.

In the first instance, in making its own calculation of what the poll tax would be in each local government area, the Scottish Office worked on the assumption that a multiplier of two would be set. If Strathclyde had forgone revenue by setting it at less, I have no doubt that, under certain circumstances, the Minister would have attacked the authority for its fecklessness. There is no question but that local authorities were expected to set the multiplier at two, and that it would have been quite unreasonable to expect them to do otherwise.

There is a second reason why the Minister cannot with any degree of credibility say that the multiplier should have been set at the minimum level of one. Local authorities were confronted with an unreasonable dilemma. If they spared Cumbrae and ignored the Scottish Office's assumptions by going for a multiplier of one, they would have given even more substantial savings to the owners of large and very large second homes, which exist, often too plentifully, in areas where circumstances are entirely different from those in Cumbrae.

The irony is that, while the owner of a tiny second home in Millport who was paying £100 in rates before the new system took effect is now asked to pay an additional £446, the owner of a large second home in one of the more scenic parts of Strathclyde, who was paying £1,000 in rates on that second home, is now offered a saving of £554, give or take a few pounds to take account of district variations. If the local authorities had opted for a multiplier of one, the owner of the tiny second home would still be £178 worse off, but the owner of the large second home would be £722 better off. Even greater inequity, as well as loss of revenue to the local authority, would therefore arise if the multiplier were set at one.

It almost goes without saying that the owners of large second homes, who are to make substantial savings under the standard community charge, are also the people who are likely to make substantial savings under the personal community charge. They are doubly and quadruply rewarded, while the very different kind of people who, by and large, own tiny flats in Millport will, in many cases, be doubly penalised, on their first home and in their second tiny home, until they quite simply cannot maintain their link with Millport and the Isle of Cumbrae. The same problem arises in some other parts of Scotland, where the ownership of a second home is far from synonymous with personal wealth, but arises from an extremely wide range of circumstances.

I am very grateful to Mr. Sandy Morton of Millport, who has kept me plied with statistics, a few of which I offer to the House. Of the 1,300 properties on Cumbrae, fully half are second homes. That is the nature of the place, and the economic basis on which it survives. By and large, they are used regularly at weekends throughout the year, and not just for a few weeks in summer; by and large, they are extremely modest properties which would not be suitable for use as first homes. That is the key fact that distinguishes my argument from a general defence of holiday homes, in which I would not engage.

The modesty of those second-home properties, usually tiny and often with shared facilities, has been reflected in the rate bills. Until April they generally ran at a little more or a little less than £100, and were sometimes as low as £50. Last year the total amount of domestic rates collected on Cumbrae, covering both the resident population and those in second homes, was £146,554. This year the proposed take in poll tax and standard community charge is £390,312—an astonishing increase of £243,658, which cannot be sustained either by the island's economy or by many of the ordinary folk who will be asked to contribute.

The effect can already be seen. At least 60 small flats have been put up for sale, while many others are being emptied of their effects in an attempt to circumvent the standard community charge for at least a limited period. Incidentally, I would be interested to hear the Minister's comments on the length of standard community charge "holiday" that local authorities are expected to grant before the charge takes effect.

As might be expected, there is widespread concern on Cumbrae about the implications for the island's future. Is that future to involve an increasing number of empty, derelict properties? Certainly no one will buy a one-room flat with outside lavatory for the privilege of paying £556,

and more in subsequent years, in standard community charge. My concern, however, is not only for the economy of Cumbrae; it is also for the people involved. I have received many sad letters, some from elderly folk for whom a little seaside flat is the one luxury in life which is now being put beyond their financial reach. Often it has been in the family for many years.

At the same time—here is the paradox—owners of large holiday homes are laughing all the way to the bank. I ask the Minister to recognise the inequity of the position, and to act. The remedy is simply to allow local authorities to vary the level of standard community charge within their own areas to take account of the level of amenity enjoyed. That involves some degree of recognition that the standard community charge is de facto a property tax. It bears no relation to the number of people using the property, the length of time for which they use it or the demands made on local government services. That admission should not be too much for the Minister to swallow.

I know that Strathclyde regional council has asked the Secretary of State to introduce emergency legislation to allow authorities discretion to vary the second home multiplier to reflect the size of the properties involved, and I fully endorse that request. This is not a matter of ideology, but one of common sense.

Throughout Scotland, many people will be waiting for a response to the debate. They will include the gentleman who telephoned me today to wish me well with it. Like many people who have a family connection with the highlands, he rescued the four walls of an old croft house from total dereliction. It is in a remote part of Sutherland with absolutely no services, and he paid rates of £43. Now he is asked—as a reward for 20 years of his own labours—for a standard community charge 10 times that amount. It is crazy.

There are hundreds of anomalous circumstances throughout Scotland relating to the standard community charge. That has been recognised by everyone, irrespective of political persuasion, except the Minister and the Scottish Office. All of these anomalies could be resolved and a lot of worry and sadness relieved by the simple remedy that I have proposed tonight.

12.10 am

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): I welcome the opportunity which the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has given me through this debate on the standard community charge in Cumbrae to put on record the progress which has been made in implementing the community charge, and to correct certain misunderstandings which, regrettably, appear to have been given wide currency—in particular about the standard community charge. The hon. Gentleman may be surprised to hear that I agree with him at least on one point. There can be no doubt that the level of standard community charge set by Strathclyde region and Cunninghame district will cause hardship to the owners of second homes on Cumbrae. However, that hardship could have been avoided, as I will show later in my remarks. To put the blame on the Government for introducing the community charge is quite wrong.

As we explained when we began our reforms of the way in which local government is paid for, one of the conditions we set was to introduce a tax which would promote local accountability by being paid by almost all of those who benefit from local services. This was one of the major shortcomings of domestic rates. We acknowledged that domestic rates had certain technical advantages. They were highly perceptible to ratepayers—so perceptible indeed that there was a massive outcry from all over the country following the revalution in Scotland in 1985. The revaluation demonstrated very clearly two of the major weaknesses of domestic rates. Rates bills went up for reasons which had nothing whatever to do with the spending policies of local authorities, and indeed for reasons which the domestic ratepayer simply could not understand. And they were paid by little more than half of all adults. The community charge gives the vast majority of adults a direct financial interest in local spending decisions and, together with our other reforms of local government finance, establishes a clear link between changes in expenditure and changes in local tax bills.

From now on, the increased local accountability we have under the community charge will encourage all local taxpayers to take a very much closer interest in the spending policies of their local councils. They will be keeping a very close eye on the value for money they get from the community charges they pay, in terms of the level and quality of the service they get in return. I am already getting a very clear impression that this is beginning to work in practice—particularly in rural areas. The abolition of domestic rates and the introduction of the community charge has been a major undertaking. It has gone remarkably well with about 99 per cent. of the full adult population now registered. There is, however, one aspect of the change where, in practice, performance has fallen far short of what we could reasonably have expected. That is the level of community charge which authorities have set. Of course, the level of standard community charge relates directly to the level of personal community charge. We provided the most generous level of grant settlement for many years and this should have enabled local authorities to set moderate community charges. However, with local authority current expenditure budgets 12 per cent. higher than last year—well above the increase required to maintain services—community charges in many areas are higher—in some areas, much higher—than necessary.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The Minister is technically abusing the opportunity given him by my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) to deal with a very specific problem of a standard poll tax that affects people who have very small holdings on the island of Cumbrae. How on earth he thinks he can get away with suggesting that this general new tax he has brought forward is beneficial in rural Scotland will certainly escape most of our constituents in rural Scotland. Will he do my hon. Friend the courtesy of replying to the specific points relating to his constituents which have been put not only by my hon. Friend but also by Mr. John Corrie, the former hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, when he warned in Committee of this very effect of the standard poll tax on the poll tax legislation?

Mr. Lang: It is important to set the scene in which the situation we now see in Cumbrae has arisen, and the levels of community charge are important in that context. If the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) does not understand the relationship between the

[Mr. Lang]

community charge levels, both personal and standard, and the spending decisions of local authorities, he does not understand one of the fundamental principles of the community charge.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that many authorities appear to have taken advantage of the turbulence caused by the introduction of the community charge to expand their activities and spend more. Perhaps they thought they could conceal this from their local charge payers. Certainly, in comparing this year's community charge level with last year's rates, payers should not forget that rates —had they remained in existence—would have risen substantially this year as a result of local authority spending decisions. Strathclyde region budgeted for increased expenditure this year of some 10 per cent., and Cunninghame district council budgeted for increased expenditure of some 17 per cent.

Because the standard community charge is—for reasons I shall explain in a moment—linked to the level of the personal charge, standard charge payers as well as personal charge payers have been affected by those spending decisions.

The standard community charge was developed in recognition of the fact that, following abolition of domestic rates, local authorities would lose income from rates on houses used as second homes but would not gain any compensating revenues from the personal community charge if there is no sole or main resident in the second home. To make up for that potential loss of revenue, and to reflect the fact that local authorities continue to provide services to houses used as second homes, the 1987 Act makes provision for a standard community charge—to be levied by local authorities in respect of dwelling houses that are not the sole or main residence of any person.

Under that Act, the standard charge is set at between one and two times the personal community charge at the discretion of the local authority. Therefore, the standard charge applies, by and large, to houses used as second homes, and we are here concerned with the change in liabilities that their owners face following abolition of domestic rates and their replacement by the standard community charge.

In some areas the use that can be made of second homes throughout the year is limited, while the stock of second homes in some localities can be quite large. Cumbrae—where, I understand, it is estimated that more than half the housing stock is used as second homes—is exceptional. But in any event, local authorities must pay regard to all homes in their areas in determining the provision of local authority services. Personal charge payers would reasonably regard it as inequitable if owners of second homes located in their local authority areas were exempt from any contribution at all to local authority costs.

We concluded that a charge of from one to two times the personal charge would be a reasonable contribution to seek from second home owners. However, in keeping with our wish to leave local authorities with as much discretion as possible, we decided not to prescribe a particular level but to leave local authorities with discretion over a wide range to set the charge with regard to their own local circumstances. It was envisaged that one of the factors that local authorities will take into account is the extent and nature of use of houses as second homes in their areas.

No advice nor encouragement was given to local authorities in Scotland by the Scottish Office that could be taken by local authorities as implying that we expected them, let alone required them, to set the multiplier at two —the maximum level permitted.

Mr. Wilson: I take issue with the Minister's last comment that local authorities were not given any guidelines, when the projections clearly set the expectation that a multiplier of two would be applied. The Minister also said that local authorities are expected to take account of the use to which second homes are put. The degree of use to which second homes in Cumbrae are put is fairly high. In many cases they are used at weekends throughout the year. Is the Minister saying that the Government believe that, because of that relatively high level of use, a high multiplier should be adopted by the local authority? Would not a much more satisfactory approach be to consider the nature of the property, rather than the number of weekends people stay at it?

Mr. Lang: No, that is not my belief. Nor is it our purpose to imply to local authorities what level of multiplier they should set. However, it is right that local authorities themselves should assess the situation in their own areas and decide policy in the light of the prevailing circumstances.

In determining the allocation of rate support grant, the revenue assumptions adopted by the Scottish Office include the assumption that income generated by the standard charge multiplier would be equivalent to that generated by a multiplier of two. That is in line with conventions used in determining the allocation of grant, which assume that local authorities maximise their revenue-raising possibilities where discretion exists. If we were to distribute grant under other assumptions, it might be argued that the distribution would be to the disadvantage of authorities having limited revenue-raising possibilities and to the advantage of those having greater scope for rating revenue because of local circumstances. But it does not imply that we expect or require local authorities to set charges at their maximum, any more than the introduction of a limit on the rate of increase in non-domestic rates implied that local authorities were being prevented from putting up non-domestic rates by a lower amount than that permitted by the maximum. Nor does it have significant financial implications in Strathclyde.

In setting their standard charge multiplier, local authorities should have had regard both to the spending objectives and to the burden that would be placed on standard charge payers. The fact they have chosen, almost without exception, to set a multiplier of two suggests that they have no intention of tailoring their spending plans to take account of the burden on standard charge payers. Indeed, it appears that they concluded that standard charge payers should pay the maximum possible. The burden that this has placed on standard charge payers has been compounded by high levels of personal community charge set by many authorities.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that there was an easy remedy by varying the multiplier within regions and districts. This would probably be administratively difficult, and certainly it implies judgments relating to the nature of different properties, and would bring us back very close to a property tax, from which we have been moving away.

However, the potential loss of income in this situation is very small indeed. Had Strathclyde chosen to go for a multiplier of one, the loss of income would have been £2,170,000, or 0·13 per cent. of its budgeted expenditure. In Cunninghame district the loss would have been £108,000, or 0·7 per cent. of budgeted expenditure.

I acknowledge, of course, that local authorities could have maintained their spending plans, had a lower standard charge multiplier, but set even higher levels of personal community charge. I am not surprised that authorities were cautious about adding further to the levels of personal community charge that they have set. But if, for example, Strathclyde region and Cunninghame district had set a multiplier of one—half the level that they have chosen—the additional cost to their personal charge payers would have been only around £1, or one third of 1 per cent. of the community charge level. Rather than do that, the local councils have chosen to impose a burden on second home owners in Cumbrae, which, instead of increasing their costs by 36 per cent. this year, as a multiplier of one would have done, has actually increased them by no less than 172 per cent. How the councils can justify their action I do not know.

I really wonder whether the region and district gave any serious thought to the effect of a multiplier of two on their standard charge payers. They must have appreciated that in many cases, of which Cumbrae is an example, there would be a substantial increase in the burden placed on individuals in meeting their local taxes. It must be concluded that they assumed that what they were doing was in the circumstances reasonable. I have no difficulty in acknowledging that for those who own second homes in Millport—and there are over 700 of them in Cumbrae—the consequences seem unreasonable.

It has been argued that, as second home owners are not local electors, local councils will not be sensitive to the interest of second home owners in their areas. While they may not always be able to exercise this direct influence over local councillors, there are, of course, many other ways of registering views, and I certainly have had a considerable amount of correspondence, both from within my constituency and as a Minister at the Scottish Office, expressing concern about the level of the standard charge being set by local authorities. This correspondence has included strong representations from those with an interest in Cumbrae. I cannot believe that councils can remain impervious to expressions of concern of this kind, even when it comes from those not on the electoral roll. We shall, therefore, be looking to councils to consider very carefully next year, when it comes to determining the levels of the standard charge and what sort of properties in their area are likely to be affected, whether, taking account of the area as a whole, it is either necessary or reasonable to levy a standard charge based on a multiplier of two on second home owners.

12.23 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): For a long time I have listened to ministerial replies to Adjournment debates and to debates about the poll tax, but that is the most disgraceful and utterly shameless response to an Adjournment debate that I have ever heard. The Minister failed to answer most of the basic points that had been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame North (Mr. Wilson). He failed to say what he might do to alleviate the situation of those who own holiday properties in my hon Friend's constituency. As usual, he tried to pass the buck to the local authorities.

The Minister fails to recognise that the community charge is a property tax with none of the fairness of the old rating system, which bore some relationship to the size of the property and the ability of people to pay. If the Duke of Argyll chooses to make Inveraray castle his second home, he will pay the same standard community charge as is paid by somebody living in a one-room flat with no toilet on the Isle of Cumbrae. That is a grossly unfair burden.

The Minister says that it is all the fault of the local authority; its expenditure is too high. Strathclyde increased its expenditure by 10 per cent.—only 2 per cent. above the current rate of inflation. Cunninghame district council increased its expenditure by 17 per cent., which is double the present rate of inflation. Even if its expenditure had not been increased to take account of inflation, the community charge in Strathclyde would have been only £45 to £50 less than it is now. In Cunninghame it would have been only £2 or £3 less than it is now.

One of my constituents has written to me about a holiday flat in Cumbrae. It has no bath and no toilet. There is cold water only in that one-room flat. Last year the rates were £56. The bill this year is £565 for that flat. Even if Strathclyde had not increased its expenditure, even by the rate of inflation, that person would still be paying £450 more this year than he paid last year. Even if Strathclyde had set a multiplier of one instead of two, that person would still be paying £200 more than he paid last year. There is no fairness in such a system.

I have a friend on the island of Arran. He is the managing director of a distillers company. He has a second home on Arran. It has five bedrooms but he will pay exactly the same rates—£565—as my constituent will have to pay.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister has made no attempt to solve the dilemma that local authorities face in having to give such large handouts to the owners of large holiday homes. That will be noted in Cumbrae. The blandness, emptiness and total unhelpfulness of the Minister's reply will be read with great anxiety on the Isle of Cumbrae.

Mr. Maxton: It will be read in that way throughout Strathclyde.

Mr. Wilson: Throughout Scotland.

Mr. Maxton: Yes—wherever there are holiday homes. That was my point about this acquaintance of mine on Arran. He has a big house. His rates will be halved, or even more than halved. How can that be fair? It is within the Minister's power to do something about it. He could do exactly what is to be done in England and Wales. The multiplier there is to be zero to two. He does not give us even that. Strathclyde wants to be able to vary the multiplier according to the——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Tuesday evening, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-eight minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 26 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

AVON LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT BILL *[Lords]*
Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Catalytic Converters

1. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reduction in levels of carbon dioxide emissions is brought about by the use of catalytic converters.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): None, Sir.

Mr. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that catalytic converters are not the complete answer to the problem and that it is most important to develop a strategy to control carbon dioxide emissions and the so-called greenhouse effect on the atmosphere?

Mrs. Bottomley: We have always recognised that catalytic converters play an important part in controlling car emissions, but they do not do the whole job because they have no effect on carbon dioxide emissions. The three-way catalyst rules out the use of lean-burn engines, which offers a promising way of saving fuel and reducing carbon dioxide. The United Kingdom treats carbon dioxide emissions and climate change with great seriousness and it is for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is today hosting a seminar on global climate.

Mr. Turner: Is the Minister aware of the excellent campaign being launched in my part of the world by the Wolverhampton *Express and Star* inviting companies large and small, local authorities and the private motorist to go lead-free? Even I have gone lead-free as a result of its persuasion. Would the Minister care to make a statement on that?

Mrs. Bottomley: The campaign run by the Wolverhampton *Express and Star* has been mentioned to me by several hon. Members and I have met the journalist, Marion Brennan, who has worked so hard on the campaign. It has performed a magnificent task and we wish it well this weekend when it hopes to adjust 1,000 cars in one day and thus get into the "Guinness Book of Records".

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: Last but not least in my green dress, I thank my hon. Friend for those sentiments and join my colleague the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) in supporting the lead that the Wolverhampton *Express and Star* has taken in encouraging people to use unleaded petrol. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential that unleaded petrol should be made widely available in Britain so that cars fitted with the latest emission control technology can be sold here?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right. The widespread use of unleaded petrol paves the way for the stricter emission standards that we shall be introducing in Britain. The Wolverhampton experience is magnificient. I understand that 50 of its 52 garages are now stocking unleaded petrol, which means that when we introduce the stricter emission standards there will be no difficulty in complying with them.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Is the Minister aware that car exhausts make a significant and growing contribution to greenhouse gases and that the European standards of allowable car emissions are 400 times more polluting than those of the United States? The imposition of United States standards in Europe was supported by Tory Euro-MPs only this April, but it is opposed by the British Government, who intend to veto the move in the Council of Ministers. Once again, Britain is seen in Europe as the friend of the polluter and the enemy of the environment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It will come as no surprise to the House to hear that in our view the way to protect the environment is by sound science and responsible action, rather than hot air and toxic words. We shall, of course, be considering the vote in the European Parliament. I have made it absolutely clear that catalysts—either oxidation or three-way catalysts—have an important part to play in protecting the environment. We have no wish, however, to rule out the use of lean-burn engines, which offer very important savings in reduced carbon dioxide and in increased fuel efficiency.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Minister stop ducking awkward questions and trying to cause confusion? There is no fundamental conflict between catalytic converters and lean-burn engines, which have not even been developed. Will the Minister take action now to ensure that existing technology is applied in this country to reduce the greenhouse effect? Will she also recognise that if the Prime Minister is to be properly briefed she must be told that the best way to reduce the greenhouse effect is to use existing technology to promote energy conservation rather than multiplying the number of nuclear power stations being built?

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should brush up on his GCSE science. Three-way catalytic converters entail greater use of fuel and increased production of carbon dioxide. We shall, of course, be considering carefully the Commission's response to the European Parliament before deciding on the best way forward. The Government have already accepted the strict emission standards agreed in November in the Luxembourg package and we are determined that air emissions from motor cars of a variety of types should be dealt with properly and effectively.

Local Government Finance

2. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what costs would be involved in introducing a system of local government finance based on capital values and a local income tax.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. John Gummer): The Labour party's two-tax system could cost up to four times as much to administer as the existing rating system.

Mr. Wardle: I thank my right hon. Friend for that information. Does he agree that a local income tax system would do very little to improve accountability, would be complex as well as expensive, and would be grossly unfair to all inner-city residents, while a capital value system would be a disaster for many people in London on relatively low incomes whose house values have risen rapidly?

Mr. Gummer: The two-tax system proposed by Labour would produce all the worst aspects of all the other systems. It would produce the worst side of the rating system and the worst side of local income tax. Last year a ward sister in my hon. Friend's constituency earning £13,000 per year and living in a flat in Bexhill would have faced a community charge of £196, compared with £425 under the Labour scheme.*[Interruption.]* It is no wonder that Labour Members are trying to make enough noise to drown out the facts about their scheme.

Mr. Wardle: Labour will never win Bexhill now. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the House will try to settle down.

Mr. Mullin: Will the Minister confirm that, quite apart from being immoral, the poll tax will cost a great deal more to collect than the existing rates system?

Mr. Gummer: First, the community charge will cost about half as much as the Labour party's scheme would. Secondly, I hope soon to be able to send the hon. Gentleman a pamphlet on the morality of the community charge.

Mr. Heddle: Will my right hon. Friend take every opportunity between now and the county elections next Thursday to explain to the 65 per cent. of owner-occupiers in this country that the financing of local government partly by capital valuation would amount to no more than a wealth tax and would hit especially hard pensioners and people on fixed incomes throughout the nation? Will my right hon. Friend also take this opportunity to denounce the campaign of fear and distortion by Labour party headquarters in Walworth road and the issuing of letters by Labour-controlled local authorities provoking fear and concern about the cost of the community charge?

Mr. Gummer: The community charge is fairer because everybody pays their bit. It is fairer because those who cannot afford it get help with the cost. It is also fairer because it makes a local council accountable. It is the last reason that the Labour party hates, because for the first time councils will be accountable to the electorate rather than to their local management committees and to Militant.

Dr. Cunningham: Why are the Tories running so scared about the poll tax that they have to wrack themselves with dishonesty about the issues? Why are Ministers so terrified that they postponed the canvass to introduce the poll tax until after the county council elections? If the poll tax is so good, why have the Government refused to debate the six poll tax orders currently on the Table before 4 May? If the poll tax is so good, why do the Government keep ducking those issues? In view of the Minister's remark that everyone will pay something, will he explain why at the Tory party local government conference the Prime Minister wrongly and dishonestly said that under the poll tax—*[Interruption.]* Yes, dishonestly.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Not in this Chamber. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw "dishonestly".

Dr. Cunningham: The Prime Minister said, wrongly and misleadingly, that 5 million people will pay nothing under the poll tax proposals. How does the Minister explain that? The Minister says that the poll tax is fairer. Perhaps he will also explain—*[Interruption.]* We have listened to enough drivel from the hon. Members for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) and for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). Perhaps the Minister will also explain why it is that people with incomes as low as £54 per week will receive no poll tax rebate.

Mr. Gummer: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman wants to ask all those questions when he has refused to answer the simplest questions about his own party's proposals. He is afraid that on the doorstep Labour's two-tax scheme will be given the thumbs down by millions of people throughout the country. Five million people will receive 80 per cent. rebates, and they will receive money to cover the other 20 per cent. in their benefits. In effect, therefore, they will not pay the poll tax. They will not pay the poll tax because it is not a poll tax. The Labour party keeps using the term "poll tax" because it wants to confuse the public and make them believe that everybody will pay the same. Nine million people will have a rebate. Labour councils are trying to frighten people by pretending that they will not get help. When the hon. Gentleman comes clean about the worst proposal for local tax since the window tax, we shall begin to answer his silly questions.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I gather that the county council elections are some time next week, but right hon. and hon. Members should keep to the subject of questions to Ministers and deal with them in a responsible way.

Rivers

3. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to change the penalties currently available for breaches of discharge consents into rivers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Colin Moynihan): The maximum penalties that may be imposed by magistrates for offences under section 32 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 are fines not exceeding £2,000 and terms of imprisonment of up to three months. On indictment in the Crown court there is no limit on the fine that may be imposed, and terms

of imprisonment can be up to two years. Penalties for pollution offences are kept under regular review but there are no immediate plans for increasing them.

Mr. Knight: Is there not a good case for making farms and businesses which break the law and pollute rivers pay the cost of cleaning them up? Does my hon. Friend agree that one current problem is that water authorities are both gamekeepers and poachers? Should not the whole House warmly welcome the establishment of the independent National Rivers Authority as the only effective way of clamping down on those who unlawfully pollute our waterways?

Mr. Moynihan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's remarks about the effectiveness of the National Rivers Authority. At present, water authorities are empowered to recover the cost of work to prevent or to remedy pollution. We firmly believe in an extension of the principle that the polluter pays.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is the Minister aware that one of Britain's worst industrial polluters is the so-called smokeless fuel plant in my constituency owned by British Coal? Is he aware that twice in the past three months that company has been found guilty of, and fined for, discharging pollutants into the river at six to nine times the permitted level? How does the Minister intend to get British Coal to clean up its act? Is he aware that according to the Welsh Development Agency the existence of the works is a major disincentive to bringing new jobs into the worst unemployment black spot in the whole of Wales?

Mr. Moynihan: As the hon. Lady knows, I am unaware of that particular case and would not have responsibility for it as it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. However, giving due courtesy to the hon. Lady's question, I will bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Ward: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the reasons why both business and agriculture continue to discharge pollutants into rivers, apart from the fact that they do not economically care very much, is that when they are hauled before the courts the fines are so small—nothing approaching the £2,000 to which the Minister referred—that they are not effective? Does the Minister agree that until the courts impose realistic fines, the poisoning of our rivers and harbours will continue?

Mr. Moynihan: The Government agree that fines should be at a deterrent and not a nominal level. That is why my right hon. Friend the former Lord Chancellor urged magistrates to impose fines for pollution offences sufficient to act as a deterrent. I accept my hon. Friend's point and I am glad that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has again drawn the attention of magistrates to the need to impose realistic fines for water pollution offences.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Does the Minister agree that it is not only the level of fines that is important but the frequency of prosecution? Is it not a fact that many polluters take a calculated risk that it is cheaper to pollute a river and risk a rare prosecution and a small fine than to invest in controlled pollution prevention? Is the Minister aware that his concern on this issue is not taken seriously in the light of the Government's decision to exempt from prosecution many sewage treatment plants which are in breach of their consents? When can we expect some consistency from the Minister on the principle that the polluter should pay?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Lady will continue to have total consistency from the Government when it comes to the importance of upgrading sewage treatment plants. That is why we are putting £1 billion behind that programme by 1992. I totally refute the hon. Lady's initial premise. It is obviously important to make sure that programmes of remedial treatment are put in action and agreed with the Department. That is the first and foremost priority and it will be reinforced by the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Allason: Is my hon. Friend aware of the very grave disquiet in South Devon about the Hope's Nose outfall, and has he seen the latest photograph of the discharge of untreated sewage, even if the photograph is three years old? Does he agree with me that it is unacceptable to have untreated sewage pumped either into our rivers or into the sea?

Mr. Moynihan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the facts about the picture published recently to the attention of the House. He will be aware that the Government share his concern that we need major improvements. That is why we are committing substantial capital expenditure towards achieving the very improvements that he and the House seek.

Urban Development Corporations

4. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which urban development corporations publish a code of consultation with local authorities in their areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Trippier): As required by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, all urban development corporations have prepared or are in the course of preparing codes of practice as to consultation with the local authorities in their areas. UDCs are not required to publish them.

Mr. McKay: According to evidence given to the Select Committee on Employment, the London Docklands Development Corporation failed to provide such a document in 1982. It took the corporation another seven years to find it. Is that not a clear contravention of section 140 of the 1980 Act? Will the Minister ensure that the requirement is complied with by all development corporations, both in spirit and intent?

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to give that assurance to the hon. Gentleman. We have made it clear to all UDCs and to local authorities in the areas in which UDCs operate that they should consult one another. As I indicated in my substantive reply, if they both agree, they should publish.

Mr. Knapman: On the subject of underused land, can my hon. Friend confirm that the canal port of Sharpness in my constituency faces a bright and prosperous future, and that three factories are currently being built in the area? Can he also confirm——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I called the hon. Gentleman to ask a supplementary to question 4.

Mr. Knapman: Yes, Sir—on the subject of under-used land. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is question 5."]

Mr. Speaker: Out by one.

Mr. Simon Hughes: There is considerable concern in London about the delay in setting up any consultation process in the docklands. Will the Minister consider introducing an amendment to the Local Government and Housing Bill to allow parish councils to be constituted in the docklands corporation part of London, which would fulfil such a purpose?

Mr. Trippier: The simple, straightforward answer is no. I am not aware of a problem with consultation at present. Indeed, it is my clear impression that consultation with local authorities in the LDDC area is better than it has ever been.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Minister aware of the damage and danger caused by lack of consultation, which applies particularly to the LDDC, because of its failure to consult adequately and the lack of proper social facilities? Is the Minister aware that the errors that have been made include failure to match the provision of transport and other services, and failure to consider what the development is for and who will gain and who will lose?

Will he investigate what is happening in the London docklands area? In the words of Sir Andrew Derbyshire, "the free play of market forces is not going to produce the best results in terms of quality".

Mr. C. J. Shepley, president of the royal town planning institute, has said:

"I fear that in 25 years we will look back on Docklands in exactly the same way that we now look back on 1960s housing schemes."

In other words, we shall see it as a total failure.

Mr. Trippier: I entirely reject all that the hon. Gentleman has said. He and his colleagues should break the habit of a lifetime and say something nice and positive about urban development corporations, especially the LDDC. The corporation's single-minded and single-purpose approach has regenerated an area of London which has been stagnant in the past and was certainly going downhill under the last Labour Administration. We have revived it, creating wealth and work. That means jobs, and the hon. Gentleman should recognise that.

Land

5. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of unused and underused land were added to the register in the last five years, and how many were removed, in 1988.

12. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of unused and underused land will be removed from the register as a result of the privatisation of the water authorities.

20. **Mr. Bevan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of unused and underused land will be removed from the register as a result of the privatisation of the electricity boards.

Mr. Trippier: A total of 37,805 acres were added to the registers in the five years up to the end of 1988, and 10,943 acres were removed in 1988.

In all 2,933 acres of electricity board land and 2,243 acres of water authority land are currently on the register. I cannot predict what the figures will be immediately prior to privatisation.

Mr. Steen: Does my hon. Friend realise that 17 per cent. of all land—vacant, public, derelict, dormant land—on the register in 1983 has been disposed of, but that 83 per cent. remains on the register? In his answer my hon. Friend said that more than 37,000 additional acres of public land—vacant, dormant and under-utilised—had been added to the register. Is he aware that even without any extra land being added it will take more than 30 years to get rid of the surplus public land that is vacant and it will cost the Government about £19 million in Civil Service costs to the Department to run the register for that period? Surely my hon. Friend should do something more dramatic. Why does he not auction off the land?

Mr. Trippier: I think that my hon. Friend is being unfair. If he looks carefully at the figures he will see that the Department's policy has been very successful. Since 1981, 164,900 acres have been entered on the register. By 31 March 1989, 80,700 acres had been removed, which is about half, mostly because the owners had sold it or brought it into use. There were then 84,200 acres on the register. There has been a net reduction of half in a very short time, and I consider that most impressive.

Mr. Baker: Does my hon. Friend accept none the less that the amount of unused and underused land on and off the register is still far too large? Will he do everything that he can to ensure that that land is brought into use? Does he agree that without in any way avoiding the planning rules, weak as they are, the privatisation of water will help to bring some of that unused and underused land into use to save our green fields and our environment?

Mr. Trippier: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's last comment. The difference between land in private ownership and land in public ownership is that the publicly owned land is not subject to the market conditions and disciplines which apply in the private sector. Of course I am not satisfied—it would be silly for me to say that I was—with the amount of public land registered as unused and underused. But we are making significant strides in reducing that amount. Ministers in various Departments should set an example to local authorities, and we are undergoing a period of consultation to produce a code of practice which will enable us to set that example.

Mr. Bevan: Why is my hon. Friend so resistant to bringing more public vacant land on to the market by the utilisation of the public land urban management scheme, which is supported by nearly 200 Conservative Members, or by some other private scheme which will result in an even greater amount of public land being brought into beneficial use for society?

Mr. Trippier: My answer is very simple and straightforward. My right hon. Friend and I have listened very carefully to the case put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and we are not convinced that the PLUMS alternative is in any way better than the existing system. As I have said in my substantive and supplementary replies, we are achieving the desired objective in a speedy fashion.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister comment on the extending and intensifying problem of land which is surplus to British Coal's requirements as a result of the rapid contraction of that industry? I think that he recognises, but will he maintain, that we need urgently a dramatic, imaginative and extensive additional programme of derelict land grant?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed the matter at some length in the past. I was pleased to respond to his request and to give an additional allocation to the Dearne Valley after he showed me round his constituency and explained the problems that exist there. I and my colleagues in the Department of the Environment recognise that where there are mining closures there needs to be a concentration of derelict land grant. However, I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that we have met his concern, at least for the moment.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister bear in mind that some unused land is available as a green lung to urban areas such as Low Moor in my constituency? Will he ensure that local authorities do not try to corrupt the local plan to avoid submitting proposals for change to his Department so that the wishes of local residents to keep areas of unused land are frustrated—particularly in areas such as Low Moor, where there are two major chemical plants—because areas of unused land are an extremely valuable asset in those circumstances?

Mr. Trippier: That is entirely a matter for planning legislation. I maintain that planning controls in that respect are very tight and very effective.

Planning Zones

6. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many simplified planning zones have been set up since their introduction, and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): In England, simplified planning zones have been adopted and brought into operation by Derby and Corby. Schemes are at various stages of preparation in Birmingham, Rotherham, Cleethorpes, Glanford and Scunthorpe, Enfield and Slough. Other authorities are considering possible designations.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the response by local authorities and others has been somewhat disappointing? Does he agree that some of the obstacles placed in the way of entrepreneurs and developers, who are trying to regenerate our inner cities and urban areas, are put there by planners and planning regulations, which, in turn, puts more pressure on green field sites to be made available. Is it not, therefore, important to encourage the greater use of simplified planning zones? If my right hon. Friend agrees with that, can he tell the House how he intends to go about encouraging councils and developers to set up more simplified planning zones?

Mr. Ridley: I agree that it is somewhat disappointing that so few simplified planning zones have come forward and I agree that the existence of a relaxed planning regime is an essential ingredient in getting redevelopment going in derelict industrial areas. The difficulties often stem from councils—sometimes even under Labour control—having an antipathy to relinquishing their detailed powers of development. I do not know why they should have that antipathy if they believe in the renewed prosperity of their areas. I wish that there was something that I could do to encourage them to be more bold. The electorate will have a chance to do something fairly soon at the coming county council elections.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Secretary of State agree that in the climate that exists in many inner cities, the value of planning has been demeaned by economic and financial pressures and that planning permission is given which is not necessarily to the long-term benefit of those who have to live in inner cities? The marjority of people who live in green sites areas see what little there is in the inner cities in terms of land available for leisure, which is at a minimum, to say the least.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman, who comes from a declining industrial area in one of our inner cities, must realise that there is a choice between detailed and over-fussy planning control and the regeneration of areas leading to jobs for the people and the rebuilding of prosperity in his city. He seems to imply that he is taking the wrong choice in that dilemma.

Community Charge

7. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish tables showing the average community charge in each local authority if introduced in 1989-90; and if he will make figures available arranged by reference to the controlling party in each such authority.

Mr. Gummer: As last year, the illustrative figures will be published once we have obtained and analysed the data needed from local authorities.

Mr. Franks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that roughly £4 out of every £5 spent in county council areas is spent by the county councils themselves and that the level of community charge over the next few years will be determined largely by which party gains control of county halls next week? Is that not the best reason why in counties such as Cumbria, which has a minority Labour administration sustained by Liberal support, the electorate should vote Conservative for lower community charges and better value for money?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend may have noticed that the 10 councils with the lowest rate poundage are all Conservative. None of the 10 with the highest rate poundage are Conservative. The community charge will reflect largely whether there is a prudent authority in county hall or whether Labour, which is always followed as fast as possible by the SLD, Liberals and the rest, continues to control them. It is good to see one Liberal present in the Chamber.

Mr. Pike: If the poll tax had anything to do with accountability, as the Government have claimed repeatedly, why did they not accept the option when the Local Government Bill was going through Parliament to allow county councils to collect their own poll tax? Is it not true that areas such as north-east Lancashire will have massive

increases in the poll tax next year, regardless of political control, because the Government will give less money to local government to run essential local services?

Mr. Gummer: The community charge will be collected by district councils, just as the rates are. It will be quite clear from the bill which portion comes from the county council. In Lancashire, it will be clear that Lancashire county council has been over-spending permanently during the period of Labour control.

Mr. Oppenheim: In the black roll of dishonour of the highest spending county councils in England and Wales, does not Derbyshire have a prominent and special place as one of the most irresponsible, profligate and high-spending councils in the country? Does my right hon. Friend agree that if people in Derbyshire want a lower community charge next year the best way to achieve that is to vote out the pack of pocket Lenins who have made Derbyshire among the highest-rated counties?

Mr. Gummer: Derbyshire is, in fact, the worst-run county in Britain and until this year it had the highest rate in England. It has just been beaten by Labour-controlled Cleveland. The only way in which Derbyshire ratepayers can get a reasonable deal is to remove the leader and his followers of Derbyshire county council, which has a bad record of overspending and underproviding. The cost per library book in Derbyshire is unbelievably high because its services are unbelievably badly run.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Why did the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) sign an early-day motion in support of Derbyshire county council's initiative in connection with Toyota if he feels that it is such a disastrous authority? What will be the impact of the poll tax on local authorities in view of the fact that figures published yesterday show that 35,000 people are missing from the electoral register in Liverpool, 14,000 from the electoral register in Glasgow, 14,000 in Manchester and 9,000 in Birmingham?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the electoral register is wholly different from the community charge register. The only reason why anybody should make the mistake that they are the same is because of Labour party propaganda using the phrase "poll tax". If anybody is off the register for that reason, it is the dishonesty of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends that has led them in that direction.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw".]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gummer: I withdraw the word "dishonesty" and substitute "misleading".

Mr. McLoughlin: Will my right hon. Friend consider the point that has just been made by the Opposition spokesman for the environment, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) in view of the fact that Toyota has just come to Derbyshire? Does my right hon. Friend agree that one reason Toyota may have come to Derbyshire is that we will have a uniform business rate which will mean that businesses will not be put at a disadvantage by loony Left-wing councils, such as Derbyshire county council?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. Had the present system continued, Derbyshire county council would have continued to push business out of Derbyshire by imposing high rates. Now it cannot force jobs out of Derbyshire because the uniform business rate will bring down the rates in high-rated Labour authorities and ensure that there are more jobs in the areas of the country that most need them. That shows once again that we are giving to each according to his need and taking from each according to his ability.

Dr. Cunningham: Is it not typical of the confused double standards of the Tory party that Conservative Members congratulate Derbyshire on its successful attraction of the Toyota investment—one of the biggest inward investments ever to come to Britain—and then, for their own naked political opportunism, come here and abuse the same county? As the Minister of State mentioned rate poundages, may I remind him that people do not pay rate poundages, they pay rate bills? May I also remind him that the counties with the highest average domestic rate bills are Buckinghamshire, which is Tory-controlled, where the average rate bill is £664, and Surrey, which is also Tory-controlled, where the average rate bill is £614, and that the three counties with the lowest average rates bills are all Labour-controlled—Durham Lancashire and Cumbria?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman represents the party that wants people to pay higher and higher rates on the value of their houses; the party that would exacerbate that unfairness by increasing the cost in all those areas where the value of housing is high and decreasing it in other areas. The only fairness is to consider the rate poundage. The hon. Gentleman does not understand the present rating system, which is why he opposes the community charge. The community charge will make the system fair.

Mr. Hanley: If my right hon. Friend publishes projected figures for the community charge, will he make sure that he publishes the figures for the five years following the year in question so that my constituents will see the reduction caused by the removal of the safety net, which at present penalises those living in outer London boroughs?

Mr. Gummer: I cannot publish the figures because I do not know what the local authority will spend in each of those successive years. Every pound per adult that a local authority overspends means an extra pound on the community charge. That is why the Labour party hates the community charge—because it means that every time they spend an extra pound on the police monitoring committee or on special arrangements for the gay bereavement cause, that pound goes directly on to what is paid by the ratepayers. The community charge produces a fair system because everybody knows whether a local authority is overspending. If one looks, for example, at the local authorities in London, one has to say that overspending has become a way of life.

Until we have the community charge, places such as Ealing, Tower Hamlets and Camden will never begin to cut their coats according to their cloth.

Pollution Inspectorate

8. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to retain the existing district structure of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Ridley: No Sir. We are currently reorganising the field force of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on an integrated basis to produce a much more effective deployment of resources. A three-region structure is being developed covering the north, south-west and south-east. This approach was adopted to ensure large enough management units to secure an adequate mix of skills to match the varying types of processes subject to control by the inspectorate.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Secretary of State aware of the concern that exists among local authorities and industrialists lest the Government's proposals for restructuring the inspectorate result in a loss of continuity at local level, with knowledge that has been built up locally over many years being lost? Will the Government further consider these local elements?

Mr. Ridley: No, Sir. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The new streamlined organisation that we are proposing will greatly facilitate the integration of control of pollution to the three elements—air, water and land—which of course was the point of the integration, which is why the solution that we propose is a good one. The hon. Gentleman may be referring to the fact that one of the five deputy chief inspectors left to take up a post in the private sector. But, then, so did Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk. Another of the chief inspectors resigned after changing his mind about some of the detailed aspects of the reorganisation proposals. That is exactly what the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) did.

Mr. Knapman: Relating to pollution and possibly to underused land, can my right hon. Friend confirm that the port of Sharpness in my constituency has a prosperous future, with three new factories being built? Can he also confirm that it is not suitable as a site for a toxic waste dump, despite rumours to the contrary?

Mr. Ridley: I can confirm that there are no sites taking hazardous waste in the Sharpness area or indeed anywhere in my hon. Friend's constituency and that there are no plans for any such hazardous waste sites there. If any hazardous waste site were to be proposed near the Sharpness canal or any other area in the lower reaches of the Severn, there would be severe water pollution problems, and that would be strictly against the provisions of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. In addition, the necessary consents would, of course, be required.

Ms. Walley: Does the Secretary of State agree that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is in a complete mess? It is still unable to recruit staff. Is he aware that Dr. Martin Biggs, who heads the local authority unit in Birmingham, is still working from his front room at home because after eight months it has not been possible to find an office for him? How can the Secretary of State justify the departure from the organisation of HMIP at district level, which used the local knowledge of local authorities? On this very day of all days, when supposedly such urgent discussions are taking place at Downing street, why will he not come to the House and tell us that he will take effective action to ensure that the country has the integrated pollution control system that it needs.

Mr. Ridley: I have come to the House, abandoning the important discussions to which the hon. Lady referred. I am disappointed that I have had to come to the House to deal with such a piffling point. The hon. Lady is wrong. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is in very good health. The organisation has had to be changed. It is being improved. I think that it would help the cause of protecting the environment if the hon. Lady were to stop trying to make quick, cheap points of the sort that she has just tried to make.

Local Government Finance

9. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the case for a system of local government finance based on capital value rates and local income tax; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Not surprisingly, I have received scarcely any representations in favour of Labour's two-tax system, which would be cripplingly expensive, would do virtually nothing to restore local accountability, and would replicate the unfairnesses of existing domestic rates.

Mr. Bennett: Is it not the case that two of the many disadvantages of Labour's twin-tax policy would be that under a local income tax Labour councils could bleed their residents dry and under the capital value tax residents would have to pay increases every time house prices rose, irrespective of increases in income? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the silence of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on the issue is due to the realisation that Labour has shot itself in the foot again?

Mr. Gummer: There is a serious problem about a capital value tax because four out of 10 people who live in more expensive houses have less than average incomes and, therefore, would not have the means to pay the tax. The truth is that Labour Members no longer wish to talk about their tax system because they found it so unpopular on the doorstep.

Mr. James Lamond: Does the Minister realise that the electors whom he is trying to reach with his statements today will treat his remarks about the Labour party's proposal with disdain because they recall that it is not so long ago that he, other Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers were dismissing the poll tax with equal disdain and saying that it was iniquitous and would never be brought in? Now they have changed their minds.

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to say that I have been a supporter of the community charge, not just since the Government proposed it. The reason that I am a supporter is that it is fairer first, because everbody pays his bit, secondly, because everybody who needs help gets it, and thirdly, because it means that the local community has control over what the local council spends on its behalf. None of those three things applies to the two-tax Labour scheme.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My right hon. Friend will know that Clifton estate in my constituency of Nottingham, South consists of 9,000 properties; it is the second largest in England. Nearly half of those properties have been purchased by the tenants under the Government's right to buy. All of them have poured their life savings into what are now their homes. Is there any moral basis for charging those people a higher local tax merely because they have improved their homes?

Mr. Gummer: No, there is not, but it would be worse than that under Labour's proposals. My hon. Friend must remember that all the tenants who have not bought their homes would be charged the capital value of the houses of which they were tenants. So neither they nor their children could even look forward to realising that capital value. Not only would they not have the means whereby to pay the tax, but they would be hit as tenants on the capital value of the houses. It is a scandalously immoral proposal.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Minister accept that his last answer is such gobbledeygook that it is not even worth commenting on? When people register and find out what the poll tax means, the 21 million people who will lose and everyone else who has a sense of decency and believes in a tax based on the ability to pay—whether in Northumbria, Cumbria, Lancashire or Avon—will cast their votes on 4 May for a fair tax system that takes from people with the ability to pay and distributes grants in a sensible fashion.

Mr. Gummer: A system that takes from people according to their ability to pay cannot be fair if it is based on the value of a house. If one accepts that, how does one explain to the four out of 10 people who have less than average earnings, but live in houses which would have above——

Dr. Cunningham: Rebate.

Mr. Gummer: So it would be done by rebate. What is wrong with the rebate on the community charge? The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has again shot himself in the foot. The hon. Member refuses to give the information upon which his tax proposal could be commented, because he is afraid of doing so. He then misleads the public by refusing to point out the rebates which we have in our system.

Housing Corporation Budget

10. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Housing Corporation to discuss the corporation's budget.

Mr. Trippier: My noble Friend the Minister for Housing, Environment and Countryside and I meet the chairman of the Housing Corporation regularly.

Mr. Baldry: Further to that answer, can my hon. Friend confirm that the Housing Corporation will enable housing associations to have ample provision in rural areas such as north Oxfordshire? What are the Government doing to encourage local authorities to take advantage of the new planning powers for development, to enable the building of more local homes for local people on low incomes?

Mr. Trippier: We are certainly providing for an expansion of housing association provision in rural areas, and north Oxfordshire will benefit from that expansion. We will soon be issuing to planning authorities a revised version of our guidance on land for housing.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister have urgent discussions with the Housing Corporation to ensure that any redevelopment of the Lower Grange estate in my constituency has adequate properties to rent at rents that those who wish to live on the estate can afford to pay?

Mr. Trippier: That was the purpose of the Housing Act 1988. It encourages housing associations—perhaps sponsored by the Housing Corporation—to make available properties at rents within the means of those on low pay.

Mr. Bowis: When my hon. Friend meets the chairman of the Housing Corporation, will he express our congratulations to the housing association movements on their contribution to housing? Will my hon. Friend also tell the chairman that it is no part of its remit to lock people out of home ownership and, therefore, will he bring forward plans to give the right to buy to housing association tenants and, in the meantime, encourage equity-sharing schemes?

Mr. Trippier: I shall certainly pass on the congratulations of my hon. Friend to the chairman of the Housing Corporation. My hon. Friend will be aware that approximately half of the housing associations have properties where the right to buy can exist. It depends on whether they are charitable or non-charitable. If they are non-charitable, they can certainly allow people to buy their homes.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The Minister will be aware that in areas such as mine young couples have terrible problems in finding a home that they can afford to buy or rent, especially in small rural villages. Will the Minister remind the House of the pitiful proportion of the Housing Corporation's funds that go to rural areas? What proportion does he hope will be spent in future in rural areas, as that is at least one way of alleviating the problem for couples in areas such as mine?

Mr. Trippier: It is not a pitiful proportion. The amount of money that we are making available to the Housing Corporation for the need identified by the hon. Gentleman has quadrupled. The hon. Gentleman also chooses conveniently to forget that we can have private sector finance or even mixed funding going into developments in the rural areas. *[Interruption.]* I am answering the question. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has the attention span of a gerbil, but I am trying to answer the question.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Remarks of that kind do not help us here.

Mr. Trippier: I apologise, Mr. Speaker. I am answering the question. I am addressing the precise point which the hon. Gentleman is trying to raise. It relates to the development of rural housing which is within the reach of people on low pay. That is precisely what we are doing with the new housing association initiative and the mixed funding which is now allowed under the Housing Act 1988.

Right to Buy

11. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give fresh consideration to removing the right to buy out the freehold from shared equity housing schemes.

Mr. Trippier: No, Sir. But we have announced proposals which would allow housing associations in certain rural areas the right of first refusal if a shared

owner wants to sell, and where a scheme is entirely privately financed, it is already possible to restrict the shared owner's right to buy the freehold.

Mr. Gill: Is my hon. Friend aware of my continuing concern about low-cost housing in rural areas? While applauding the easing of the planning constraints by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Chancellor's announcement about the tax treatment of the proceeds of the sale of land below market prices for the purpose of affordable housing, does my hon. Friend accept that it is the success of this Government's policies in encouraging home ownership which has meant that the modern generation aspires to own their own home rather than to tenant it? Any additional help which my hon. Friend can give to housing associations to provide for that market will be very much appreciated.

Mr. Trippier: I very much welcome the fact that my hon. Friend has mentioned the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the recent Budget about tax changes which will help development in rural areas. My hon. Friend also referred to the announcement recently by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment about the easing of planning constraints. I simply draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that although I accept that he may not have liked my substantive answer to his substantive question, the truth is that the Housing Act 1988 has made it possible to offer privately financed shared ownership schemes with non-staircasing and we are not restricting those in any way at all.

Baby Food (Contamination)

3.32 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the contamination of baby food.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): It is difficult to imagine the twisted minds that could mount such a vicious attack on defenceless babies.

Of 17 incidents of baby food being reported as contaminatd since 7 April and 11 more reported today, a number have been recognised as examples of deliberate contamination and are the subject of police inquiries co-ordinated by the Metropolitan police. In some cases there have been blackmail demands. It would not be helpful for police investigations if I were to go into greater detail, as I am sure that the House will readily understand.

Wherever such incidents have been reported, immediate steps have been taken by the police, the manufacturers and the retailers to remove products of the kind that have been found to be contaminated from the stores concerned and to warn the public of the risk. The police are giving these investigations the highest priority. Parents and others looking after babies should in the meantime exercise the greatest care in checking both the seals of baby food containers and their contents before feeding children.

Mr. Sheerman: The Opposition share the deep concern felt by the public in general and the parents of young children and particularly of small infants about this horrible campaign which attacks the most vulnerable members of society. The Oppositon want to know whether the Government understand that this is a co-ordinated attack on the food of a vulnerable part of our society and whether the police are taking sufficiently energetic steps to bring the culprits to justice. We need to know in the House whether the reports in the press that this is a very highly sophisticated criminal activity, perhaps of a Mafia style of operation, are true, or if it is, one, off operation. Do the police know whether that is the case?

The House will wish to know whether the powers under the Food Act 1984 are sufficient to allow local authorities to step in and help the police to protect the public from contaminated food. We do not want the inquirers to be embarrassed, but there have been disturbing reports this morning that large sums of money have already been paid to such blackmailers. I hope that the Minister can reassure us both on that point and also that the police and local authorities are protecting young children from contaminated food.

Mr. Patten: First, I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his words of support for what the police and others are doing, and for his words of condemnation, on behalf of the official Opposition, for these foul and despicable attacks, which are of a most cowardly nature and against the vulnerable in our society. I am sure that the whole House is united in that condemnation.

Secondly, I assure the hon. Gentleman and the official Opposition that the police are, and have been, doing everything possible to investigate these serious threats to individual safety. Thirdly, I and the Government are convinced that the powers available under the Food Act 1984 are adequate to enable local authorities to assist the police and public safety by ensuring that food sold in shops is fit to eat.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the House will understand that I cannot respond in detail to the specific questions that he asked about operational matters. The Government are determined to resist all attempts at consumer terrorism in this country.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement. I understand that Mrs. Laura Russell, when feeding her six-month-old baby, Chantelle, in Newport on the Isle of Wight on Saturday, discovered a sliver of glass in a jar of Heinz chocolate dessert. The baby was subsequently examined at the Royal County hospital on the Isle of Wight and, mercifully, found to be unharmed. Those events took place on Saturday, but only came to light yesterday. There seems to be a conspiracy of silence over the matter. I understand that, even as I speak, similar products are still on the shelves in the same stores, and available to the public.

Mr. Patten: There is no conspiracy of silence. This afternoon I have given the House and my hon. Friend the full facts as I and the Home Office know them. May I express my horror at the unfortunate assault—for that is what it is—on the child in my hon. Friend's constituency. I am extremely glad that the child suffered no ill effects. No baby or young child has suffered serious injury from contaminated food, thanks to the vigilance of parents.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I, from my side of the argument, support the Government's attempts to resist consumer terrorism? They are entirely right to do so. I hope that the police make speedy progress in bringing the criminals to book so that they get their just desserts in the courts. If this is a long-term problem and the inquiry takes weeks, if not longer, will the Minister look again at the Food Act 1984 to find out whether the Government have powers to encourage local authorities to insist that this small range of baby foods—it is not a vast range of products—are sold with attended across-the-counter service, as opposed to unattended supermarket service? In that way, we can try to give the public some confidence that such events will not happen again.

Mr. Patten: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for our stalwart attempts to ensure that this country never gives in to consumer terrorism and the hijacking of food shops and stores up and down the land, which would have a destabilising effect. The Government are determined in all circumstances to resist that. The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting suggestion about the workings of the Food Act. We are convinced that the Act contains adequate powers for local authorities, environmental health officers and others to investigate any suggestion of food being unfit. I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's interesting suggestion to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Does not my hon. Friend agree that these are crimes of magnitude and should not be trivialised in any way? Will he confirm that, if a baby were to die during this present epidemic of pollution of cans and jars, the police would treat such an event as murder, and that the provisions of the courts would be correspondingly increased?

May I make two useful suggestions? First, food of this type should be displayed in a prominent part of supermarkets under the eyes and ears of those who work at the cash registers and in the reception areas. That will mean that people cannot sneak behind the display counters and do their work.

Secondly, warning notices should immediately be placed in all supermarkets that deal with these types of food telling people to be vigilant and saying that those tampering with products should be reported to the management as soon as they are spotted. Such signs would increase the vigilance of customers and staff in all these supermarkets.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right to say that the charges that could be laid by the police—it would be their decision—could range from assault up to attempted murder, punishable by life imprisonment. The most severe penalties are available to the courts, should such charges be laid. I am sure that the food manufacturing industry, which has an excellent record of health, safety and hygiene in manufacturing baby foods in this country over many years, will have listened carefully to all the advice given to it.

There is no evidence of any of these foodstuffs being contaminated during the manufacturing process—hence, what my hon. Friend has said is right. It is up to retailers and others to exercise maximum vigilance in the stores where these foodstuffs are sold. I am sure that they will listen as carefully to my hon. Friend as I did when he gave excellent advice on the radio this morning.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Although I appreciate that it may be difficult to divulge a great deal of information at this stage, since different brands of food and different types of containers have been found to be affected in different parts of the country, will the Minister assure us that he will consider providing the maximum possible information in the circumstances to consumers, who are very worried about the problem?

Mr. Patten: We will certainly make available to consumers all the information that we have. I have given all the facts this afternoon. A range of products made by two manufacturers have been affected.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I welcome very much what my hon. Friend has said. I am sure that all sane people will agree that we must never give way to such blackmailing campaigns.

My constituent, Mrs. Murphy, is quite convinced that the seal on the pineapple dessert that she bought had not been tampered with. We need to allay the fears of those who believe that the production process, as well as the opportunities that arise for contamination on the shelves, should be thoroughly investigated. I hope that my hon. Friend will consider that, too.

Mr. Patten: I thank my hon. Friend for the first part of his remarks, and I pass on my sorrow, through him, to his constituent for her experience. I am extremely glad that the child is safe and well.

I do not want to go into details of police investigations, but I can tell my hon. Friend that, on the information given to me as late as this afternoon, the police have no evidence of contamination during the manufacturing process, and considerable evidence of contamination at a later stage.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We welcome the Minister's statement and assure him of our support for his stand against consumer terrorism in Northern Ireland, where shops have been affected.

Can the Minister shed any light on the allegations that considerable sums have already been paid out for blackmail? Have funds been supplied through insurance companies such as Risk Control to allow firms to deal with such matters? Surely that, in itself, will encourage such campaigns?

Mr. Patten: I know that the hon. Gentleman, with his long experience in his constituency and in the Province, with its troubled recent past, will appreciate that it is sometimes less than helpful not only to give information about police investigations, but even to speculate about them. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not answer his question more fully than that on this occasion.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support, and I thank the whole House for its determination to ensure that the country never gives in to consumer terrorism.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): It is right that my hon. Friend should play no part in spreading alarmist fears, but, with respect, does he agree that his statement should have gone a great deal further in showing the risks to parents and consumers? In particular, as most of the incidents appear to have taken place in the south-east and, to a lesser extent, in the midlands, is this a regional problem? Is it isolated to certain types of food? What should people be looking out for in jars and cans and what measures can they take—for example sieving their contents—to prevent any risk to their children?

Mr. Patten: I welcome my hon. Friend's question and the opportunity that it gives to provide the information that he thinks would be helpful. First, the incidents are far from restricted to the south-east. They have occurred in the north-west, Cheshire and possibly Lancashire. Secondly, I can give a complete list of the forms of contamination which my hon. Friend might find of interest, as would parents. Contamination has included the insertion of glass splinters, pins, broken razor blades and, on one occasion, caustic soda.

The advice that I gave the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is good advice: parents should take the greatest possible care to check the seals of containers. Thereafter, they should take the greatest possible care to check the foodstuff before it is served to their child or children, and that includes looking at and smelling the substance to make sure that it is pure.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): Is the Minister aware that I agree with everything that he has said about this appalling state of affairs, and that I am grateful for what he said earlier—that there is no evidence of the source of the contamination being the factory but that contamination takes place beyond that, either in the shop, in transit, or wherever? I am sure that what he has said this afternoon will be welcomed by many thousands of my constituents who work in Heinz's factory in Wigan.

Mr. Patten: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Firms such as Heinz and Cow and Gate have an excellent record, recognised worldwide, in food hygiene and safety. I can only repeat that the police have no evidence of contamination during the production process.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Is it not hard for the House to comprehend that sick people in our society, for the sake of a cause, would risk subjecting innocent babies to lethal injury? Thank God that there has been no real tragedy to date. Will the Government monitor the situation carefully and reassure those anxious mothers who now fear buying any baby foods that every possible action will be taken on their behalf?

Mr. Patten: I can assure my hon. Friend that—most importantly of all—the police, the Home Office, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is present—and the Department of Health are doing everything possible to ensure that all avenues are included.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question. I shall call one more hon. Member.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is the Minister entirely satisfied that the seals to which he referred during the exchanges are in all cases adequate? It would seem that we need urgently to consider the sealing of such products so that customers can be entirely confident that the products have not been tampered with.

Mr. Patten: I cannot give a straight answer to that question because I have not examined all the seals, nor do I, alas, have exact evidence of the different sorts of seals used. I do know that the police are convinced that, under most circumstances, the seals woud have had to be broken to admit the contaminated objects, liquid or substance. In the meantime, it is important for parents and those who care for children to be as vigilant as possible.

Agriculture Council (Price Fixing)

3.48 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the outcome of the Agriculture Council dealing with this year's price review.

Last week's Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, was devoted almost entirely to the Commission's proposals for agricultural prices and related measures for 1989-90. After a whole week of negotiations, agreement was finally reached on a compromise package in the early hours of the morning of Saturday 22 April.

The package represents a very satisfactory outcome for the United Kingdom. It meets our key objectives of respecting the February 1988 European Council conclusions, in particular not weakening the stabiliser mechanisms; and of ensuring a fair deal for United Kingdom farmers which improves their competitive position. The Commission confirmed, at the completion of the negotiations, that the 1989 budget for CAP guaranteed expenditure would be respected and that expenditure in 1990 would be well within the financial guidelines.

So far as the United Kingdom is concerned, I obtained a substantial devaluation of the green rate at which support prices in ecu are converted into sterling. It will reduce United Kingdom monetary gaps generally by one half, and completely remove the monetary gap, and therefore the monetary compensatory amount, for beef. At my insistence, the discriminatory element of the Commission's original proposal, which envisaged dismantling only one third of the gap, was completely removed. Overall, this has a significantly favourable effect on MCAs from the United Kingdom point of view.

The devaluations will take place at the beginning of 1989-90 marketing years and will improve our farmers' competitive position relative to those in other member states. In themselves, they should increase United Kingdom producer incomes by about £155 million in a full year, when all the effects have worked through.

The changes to green rates for the United Kingdom and other member states represent a further significant step toward the complete dismantling of monetary gaps, and hence MCAs, by 1992—certainly by the end of 1992—for which I have been consistently pressing.

Turning to other elements of the package, a major breakthrough was achieved on the levels of milk co-responsibility levy. From the 1989-90 marketing year, no co-responsibility levy will be charged on milk produced in the less-favoured areas, and the levy on milk produced outside those areas will be reduced by 0·5 per cent., to rates of 1 per cent. for producers of up to 60,000 kg per year, and 1·5 per cent. for other producers. Most important, it was agreed that this is the first step towards complete elimination of the levy, and the Commission undertook to propose a further step for 1990-91.

I have always opposed co-responsibility levies as a mechanism for CAP reform, and have constantly pressed for their reduction and subsequent elimination, so this development is greatly to be welcomed. The cost of the changes will be met by a 2 per cent. cut in the intervention price for butter and by management measures. Moreover, following my pressure, it has been agreed that the

Commission will examine the administration of the co-responsibility levy for cereals and will submit any appropriate proposals.

The Commission will also study the functioning of the milk quota system, and I will be pressing for that to include the question of greater flexibility in the transfer of quotas.

Community prices for sugar will be reduced by 2 per cent. this year. This is considerably less than the Commission's proposal for a 5 per cent. cut, and reflects the concerns expressed by member states, including the United Kingdom, about the effect both on Community producers and on the suppliers of cane sugar from the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. As a condition of my agreement, I secured a comitment to safeguard the position of Community refiners of cane sugar.

In addition, the support prices for field beans and for a number of Mediterranean products will be reduced, and the stabiliser mechanism extended to cauliflowers and apples. Basic support prices for other products will remain unchanged in ecu terms, but the prices actually applied are liable to be cut automatically, under the stabiliser arrangements, if output exceeds a given level. In addition, there will be a reduction in the period of intervention for cereals and oilseeds, and lower monthly price increases for those commodities and for protein crops.

The existing definition of double-low rapeseed—sometimes called double-zero rapeseed—has been extended to 1990-91. I pressed for this delay, which is of importance to our growers, as commercially viable varieties able reliably to meet a lower definition in United Kingdom conditions are not yet available.

During the Council I took a further opportunity to raise yet again the importance of taking early and effective action to combat fraud in the CAP.

The settlement keeps within the budgetary limits, extends the stabiliser mechanisms, further improves the competitive position of United Kingdom farmers, and has only a very small effect indeed on the retail price index. Overall, therefore, it is a good settlement for United Kingdom interests.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I welcome the Minister's success in obtaining abolition of the co-responsibility levies in certain areas and reductions of those on the MCAs. Equally, I welcome the review of the milk quota. I urge the Minister to try to ensure that this is done as speedily as possible, because we really must avoid too much uncertainty creeping into the dairy sector.

The Minister emphasised that the recent EC price proposals kept within the budget requirements laid down at the February 1988 summit. I cannot understand why the Minister takes credit for that. My understanding of the Prime Minister's statement to the House on 15 February 1988 is that those restrictions were legally binding, so the Minister and his colleagues had no option but to keep within the relevant financial disciplines. Will the Minister confirm that that legally binding requirement stands?

To what extent does the Minister believe that we managed to remain within the financial guidelines because of the greenhouse effect and of the drought in the United States, as opposed to careful management by the Commission? To us, that is a key point. About two thirds of total Community spending has been on agriculture. At last year's Brussels summit, it was agreed that that proportion would be reduced. Will the Minister say by how much the review has reduced the amount of spending on agriculture as a percentage of European funding as a whole?

The Minister stated that, as a result of the review, prices for farmers will increase by more than £115 million. Bearing in mind the fact that Britain already faces high inflation and that food prices are creeping up, will the Minister say by how much he estimates that the agreement will increase prices in the shops? That matter concerns a great many people.

The Minister referred quite rightly to fraud. As he and I both know, between 10 and 20 per cent. of the CAP budget is lost through fraud. The Minister has been strong on rhetoric but weak on support. Those are not my own words but the sentiments expressed by Lord Cockfield when speaking in another place—*[Laughter.]* Right hon. and hon. Members may laugh, but Lord Cockfield was the Commissioner dealing with the matter, and I suggest that he knows considerably more about it than right hon. and hon. Members opposite.

What action is the Minister taking to put his own house in order? He will recall that it is more than three months since the director of the serious fraud office, John Wood, revealed that he was close to completing inquiries into two significant cases of agricultural fraud in Britain involving EC moneys. Will the Minister confirm that those cases exist in reality and say when definite action may be expected?

Intertwined with the EEC price review have been general discussions on the general agreement on tariffs and trade. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has hurried back from an important conference in the United States where he discussed that matter. Will the Minister explain how the price review will aid our discussions in GATT? If trade protection is cut and the resulting high food prices, consumer taxes and Third world destabilisation are all to be tackled, we must ensure that the latest review is helpful to that process.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening comments and for his welcome to many parts of the package.

The milk quota review really concerns the functioning of the milk quota and does not apply to the future of the milk quota system after 1992. I, like the hon. Gentleman and all dairy farmers, am anxious that that matter should be discussed in the Council at an early stage, so that our farmers will know the way ahead in the 1990s. I have pressed for that many times, but it was not right to raise that matter in these price negotiations. The review will be about the functioning of the system. I hope, as I made clear, that we shall secure changes in transferability and greater flexibility. There will be an early report, because the Commission has undertaken to report on that aspect by the end of July this year.

The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to say that we have to operate under legally binding limits, which certainly affect the climate in which the discussions take place. However, it is right that we should ask the Commission each year, at the end of our negotiations, to make it clear that we have fully met those legally binding limits. If there is any risk of over-running them, we would need to have a joint meeting with ECOFIN. As I have said, clearly we are well within the limits.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the drought in North America has had some impact on Community

[Mr. MacGregor]

expenditure this year. It is also important to recognise that the stabilisers are having their effect, too, and that, without any question, the impact is already coming through. Indeed, as a result of those negotiations we are well below the legally binding guidelines for both this coming year and the year after. That is a very good outcome.

The hon. Gentleman asked by what percentage the proportion of total Community spending devoted to agriculture had been reduced. We are actually still working out the precise figures, and pehaps I can let him have that information shortly. He also asked about the impact on consumers, and I am pleased to tell him that the outcome of these negotiations, which is favourable to our farmers, has virtually nil impact on the retail price index—at most, one twentieth of 1 per cent.

I reject entirely the view that I have been weak on support in asking for actions on fraud. I have raised this matter very regularly in the Council since I became Minister, orginally with little support from other Ministers. I am pleased to say that that support is growing almost by the month. On this occasion, four Ministers specifically spoke strongly in favour of the actions I was recommending. There are three sorts. First, I asked the Commission to look into the allegations made in the European Parliament recently about butter expenditure, and to report. Secondly, I asked for an action programme on the Court of Auditors' report and recommendations on intervention and various aspects of the existing system. I was given a very good timetable of proposals due to come in front of our Council soon from the Agriculture Commissioner. I am satisfied that he treats this matter with as much seriousness as I do.

Thirdly, I floated the suggestion that in future, when we are looking at major changes to any proposal or at any new proposal, in addition to having a report on the financial consequences, we should have from the Commission a report on how any new proposal would be controlled, administered and made fraud-proof. I hope that that suggestion will increasingly get support. To me, for the future, that is one of the major contributions the Agriculture Council can make in reducing fraud.

Finally, on GATT, it was timely that I was in the United States in the last two days, both because it came immediately after the outcome of the Geneva discussions on what is effectively the mid-term review of the Uruguay round of GATT, and also because it came immediately after the completion of the price negotiations. I was able to tell my American counterpart that, through the price review, we have fully met the commitments that we have undertaken in the Geneva round of discussions. The stabilisers have been honoured. In fact, we have taken the process of reform further in some directions, and the outcome is totally consistent with our position in GATT. For that reason it was welcomed in the United States. Certainly the atmosphere this year is very different from what it was last year. I hope that we will now be able to work constructively together on the latest stages of the GATT Uruguay round.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House will be aware that we have a ten-minute rule Bill after this statement and a very long list of amendments to get through before Third Reading of the Social Security Bill. I ask for brief questions and for hon. Members not to repeat questions that may have been asked before.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): I assure my right hon. Friend that what he has achieved, particularly in relation to MCAs and the milk co-responsibility levy, will be enormously welcomed by the agricultural community, some sections of which are extremely hard pressed at present. However, can he give some indication of the timetable he expects—I know it is difficult to predict in Common Market negotiations—in relation to the review of milk quotas and also for the final removal of the co-responsibility levy?

Mr. MacGregor: This year we have done well with the timetable, because we have reached decisions rather earlier than usual. We will be getting a review of the functioning of the milk quota system by the end of July. I will certainly be pressing for early action to follow up proposals that I hope will be made. We have a commitment to make further progress next year on the co-responsibility levy on milk, and I assure my right hon. Friend that I share his view. One of my main objectives next year will be to make much further progress on this levy; I should like it removed altogether.

Regarding my right hon. Friend's point on MCAs, I think it is worth giving relevant figures to the House, because they demonstrate the substantial progress made in removing the unfair competition elements that existed in the last two years through the MCA system for our farmers.

Let us compare the figures for February 1987 with today's figures. In crops, the negative MCAs have dropped from minus 32·8 to minus 2·6. In milk they have dropped from minus 31 to minus 1·8. In eggs and poultry they have dropped from minus 28·3 to nil. In pigmeat they have dropped from minus 27·2 to nil. In beef they have dropped from minus 24·5 to nil. We have taken a major step forward in ensuring fair competition for our farmers.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): May I thank the Minister for looking after the interests of dairy and beef farmers? Can he give an assurance that, in the next round of negotiations, he will look after the interests of sheep farmers?

Having said that, I am afraid that the majority of those involved in agriculture will not consider this a very good settlement. The Minister mentioned a figure of £155 million. I am sure that he is aware that the industry now pays £800 million in basic interest rates and borrows £6,450 million, the highest amount ever. Will he give an assurance that he will do all that he can to help agriculture in its fight to put an end to the disastrous effects of high interest rates? Finally, will he tell us whether the £155 million that he mentioned is net or gross profit?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman will realise, the price negotiations were about the price negotiations and not about anything else.

I know of the hon. Gentleman's concern about sheepmeat. The review of the sheepmeat regime is still ahead of us: I have often told the House that I expect this to be a long and difficult negotiation, and I now believe that it will be even longer than I thought. Meanwhile, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to learn that, as a result of decisions that we made last week, there will

be an improvement in the sheepmeat sector of 4·3 points in the 1989-90 marketing year as a result of the green rate changes. That is a significant improvement, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that this negotiation has helped in that respect.

Finally, let me answer the hon. Gentleman's question about the figures. The £155 million is net for a full year, after account has been taken of the effect on feed. We calculate, however, that dairy producers' incomes will increase by another £20 million as a result of the changes in the milk co-responsibility levy.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a co-responsibility levy is wholly incompatible with a quota system? Will he say whether all producers will pay only 1 per cent. up to the first 60,000 kg of production, or whether some will pay 1·5 per cent? Will he also pay some attention to not allowing the principle of differentiation between the small and the larger farmer to become too widespread?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall go further than my hon. Friend and say that I do not consider the co-responsibility levy system appropriate in the context of CAP reform as a whole. I think that we should be tackling it in other ways, and I am therefore eager to find any way of obtaining support for reducing and eliminating the system. We made big progress this year: for the first time, other Ministers are coming in behind the argument that I have been pushing ever since I became a member of the Council.

The first 60,000 kg in the milk co-responsibility levy is for small producers with a quota of less than that amount. Those with a quota above that will pay the full 1·5 per cent. I thought that quite hard last week; it seemed to me wrong to give preferential treatment to the small producers, of whom we tend not to have very many. It also seems wrong —I think that this is what my hon. Friend had in mind —as a general approach to CAP reform. I nearly obtained majority support but not quite, and I thought it better to settle for this now— because it was the first major step in dealing with the co-responsibility levy—knowing that we would come back to it next year.

Hon. Members representing constituencies where dairy farmers are in the less-favoured areas will find it worth noting that the LFA change—a nil co-responsibility levy —will affect some 25 per cent. of our dairy producers.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Minister referred to the north American drought and its effect on Community prices. Does he accept that perhaps that drought has a good deal to do with the destruction of rain forests in central America and Amazonia—that is a climatologist's opinion and not mine? Will he put on the agenda of the next Council meeting the import from unsustainable sources of woods such as mahogany on which I have received frankly helpful answers from the Parliamentary Secretary? Does the Minister recognise that it is a European matter and not simply a British one?

Mr. MacGregor: As it happens, I have come to the House straight from the global climatology seminar in another place. I certainly take a very great interest in these matters and I hope that the Council will be able to discuss them. We have been discussing them informally, but I hope that we will be able to discuss formally in the Council the implications for Community agriculture and forestry, among other matters. The hon. Gentleman may know that we are in the final stages of agreeing a Community forestry programme which will also be helpful. The weight of evidence and scientific opinion about the north American drought this year is that it is not yet linked to the longer-term effects. Nevertheless, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the global climatology issues will very much affect agriculture, and need to be discussed.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): While the Minister has made the farmers very happy, does he agree that it is an abuse of the EEC pricing system to consider proposals for 36 separate green currency changes at a net cost to the Community of less than nothing, which will mean that the entire cost of the extra price will go to the consumer and less than nothing, according to the figures, to the EEC? Is it not simply an accountancy fiddle to help keep the Community's expenditure within the spending limits? Does he have any proposals to bring down the surplus production of food, which is costing taxpayers throughout Europe more than £200 million a week to dump and destroy?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my hon. Friend felt that the February 1988 reforms would not bite and did not have much impact, but he should recognise the progress that has already been made. One cannot change everything overnight, and it is important that we carry through internationally CAP agricultural reforms in dealing with subsidies and surpluses. I hope that my hon. Friend will notice the progress that has already been made. It is not an accountancy fiddle. The figures are quite clear; they show that, as a result of last week's negotiations, on current forecasts we will be £700 million below the ceiling in 1988 and 1·9 billion ecu below it in 1989. Those are real figures and they demonstrate the real progress that has been made. At the same time, I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the green currency changes were absolutely right, because United Kingdom farmers were being disadvantaged. That is why that was one of my prime objectives in the negotiations.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister says that he cannot deal with the problem overnight, but the Government have been at it for 10 years. The Prime Minister sticks up an Agriculture Minister about once every two years and then she sacks him. We have an annual farce when the Minister tells us he has got a good deal. How much of the money will end up in farm workers' pockets? How much will end up in the pockets of the godfathers? No doubt one of these years the Minister will be telling us that they have given the Mafia a seat at the table.

Mr. MacGregor: Not for the first time, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has been listening.

Mr. Skinner: I have.

Mr. MacGregor: In the past year, we have made considerable savings, for which I have given the figures. We have, quite rightly, improved farm incomes as a result of the green currency changes for United Kingdom farmers. That will work throughout the farming system and be of benefit to it. It has an absolutely negligible effect on consumers. The hon. Gentleman referred to other elements——

Mr. Skinner: Farm workers.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already dealt with that in saying that the measures will work through the farming system.

One of the other issues that I raised in the Council is fraud. I believe that we are now getting down to detailed proposals which will enable us to take more and more action on that front. The hon. Gentleman knows that I agree with him on that, and I hope that he will allow that we are making considerable progress.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the package and on the great effort he has made on the monetary compensatory amounts. He needs no reminding from me that few, if any, cereal farmers in East Anglia made any profits last year. Does he agree that it is important that probably the best cereal farmers in the world are allowed to make a living, not only for their own sakes, but for the sake of the people they employ, who have just been mentioned by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? The workers' livelihoods depend on sound agriculture, just as much as those of the farmers, and the many rural industries that depend on cereal farmers for their incomes.

Mr. MacGregor: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend. We are neighbours and share the same problems. My hon. Friend will acknowledge that, in our part of the world, we have had bad harvests in the past two years, which have had a considerable impact on the incomes of cereal farmers. We must hope that that does not happen a third time. There is not much doubt that I could not have achieved more this year in the price negotiations for cereal farmers. Their relative position has changed considerably.

Sugar is the other major concern that my hon. Friend probably has in mind. It is important to take into account all the factors involved, including, of course, the green pound changes; that means that returns to United Kingdom growers and beet processors will rise by about 2 per cent. after the effect on levies and the devaluation of the green pound are taken into account—even after the price reduction.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): While welcoming the green pound devaluation, I regret that it has taken 10 years to reach even this stage, and that the differentials have not yet been eliminated. How will the Minister's package measure up to the needs of an industry facing rising costs, not the least of which is the 5 per cent. interest rise of last year? I estimate that it will cost the industry at least twice as much as any improvements in this package. Are we, yet again, facing the problem of too little, too late for the industry?

Mr. MacGregor: It is not 10 years, but two years. I gave the hon. Gentleman the figures for two years ago. He will see that the monetary compensatory amounts are negligible in two sectors and that in three other sectors there is a nil MCA. That is a considerable improvement. I hope that the £155 million improvement in farm incomes negotiated as a result of this deal will be helpful to farmers. It is important to bear in mind also that we are talking about support prices. The returns to farmers could be higher than that, depending on the market. We have been discussing only the support prices themselves.

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): Will my right hon. Friend accept that this is the news that our dairy and livestock farmers have deserved for a long time, especially the news on the MCAs and the co-responsibility levy? When it comes to the review of quotas and their transfer, will my right hon. Friend carefully consider the difficulties of young farmers and new entrants to the industry?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. In his second question he raises one of the major difficulties of any quota system. I have made it clear to our farming industry that, if there is a general consensus about one or two of the possibilities that might help to deal with that —the siphoning of milk quotas is one of the most obvious —I should be happy to consider them. There is no consensus at present, and it is difficult to see a way of helping some of the new entrants into dairy farming. That is, unfortunately, one of the consequences of a quota system.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): While the Minister says smugly that he gest a fair deal for farmers—although he admits that there will be a price rise for the ordinary consumer—is he doing any work in the Cabinet to try to unfreeze child benefit, which was debated earlier in the week? Many consumers will be aware of the priorities he has exhibited today. Does he accept that more than £1,000 million will be spent on propping up the Common Market this year and next year—and no doubt for many years after?

Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether more or less than 70 per cent. of total EC income will go on the CAP, or has he not yet made that calculation? Does he accept that it is lame to come to the House after 10 years of Tory Government and discover that over £6,500 million is being cheated out of CAP funds by fraud? When is he going to do something about it and catch the crooks?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman bandies about figures without knowing what he is talking about. By definition, one cannot know the precise figures on fraud, but I am almost certain that the figures that he has quoted are way, way above what the figures are likely to be. Nevertheless, any loss of taxpayers' money through fraud is highly reprehensible; that is why I have taken the fraud issue so seriously. I have already made it clear that the effect of the review on consumers is one twentieth of 1 per cent. and it will have a negligible effect on improving the prospects of our farmers. The proportion of Community expenditure which is spent on CAP is less than 70 per cent.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Can I thank my right hon. Friend for his vigorous and effective negotiating in the interest of the whole of the United Kingdom, not just one section of it? On specifics, is it not the case that the cost of the reduction in the co-responsibility levy has been met by the reduction in cost of storing surplus butter? In view of the dramatic increase in costs, including interest costs, why is it therefore necessary to reduce by 2 per cent. the support price—the intervention price—for butter?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has just said. The reason for the 2 per cent. reduction in the intervention price is that it was important that that decision was budget-neutral, and the reason for that is that, despite all the reforms that we have carried through, the dairy sector is, at the moment, still the most expensive sector in the Community and as it is still expensive, it is necessary to have a eye to costs. Nevertheless, I expect that now that we have reduced the

butter mountains and the skimmed milk powder mountains, our expenditure on that will work its way through the system and the dairy sector will then become less expensive than it is now.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Minister has already said that he expects that negotiations on the sheepmeat regime will be long and difficult, but will he assure the House that he is aware of the importance of the timing of any such changes and of the disruption and the dislocation that could be caused to the marketing year both from the uncertainty about when such changes will be introduced and about what would happen if they were introduced at the wrong time in the marketing year?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, Sir.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will do my best to call the hon. Members who have been rising, but it will depend on brief questions.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): May I join in the congratulations to my right hon. Friend on his outstanding success over the co-responsibility levy and the green pound? Bearing in mind the uncertainty in the livestock industry, especially in hill areas, will he do everything possible this summer to ensure that an increase in the suckler cow subsidy is as high as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks on the price negotiations. I am aware of the feelings that he and others like him have about the suckler cow premium and I shall certainly make an announcement about that before 15 June, which is the deadline by which that announcement is required.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): This is an excellent package, and I should like to add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend and to reassure his doubters that the money will find its way right through the system, be it to the farm workers or to the bank managers. I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks about the co-responsibility levy on dairy produce but having negated that, will he turn his attention to the cereals co-responsibility levy which has encouraged cereals farmers to produce more rather than less, and which is the most worthless tax that there has ever been?

Mr. MacGregor: I totally share my hon. Friend's views about the cereals co-responsibility levy. I have been repeating such remarks ad nauseam in the Council since we have had the co-responsibility levy. I did it again this year, and we achieved one improvement, in that the Commission is now committed to looking at the administration of the cereals co-responsibility levy. I assure my hon. Friend that I intend to build on that.

It was clear this year that, for the first time, we were getting growing support for our attacks on the milk co-responsibility levy. It seemed right to build on that and to secure results on that this year, not least because it means that the Council has now committed itself to phasing out one of the co-responsibility levies. The Council has now begun to recognise the principal arguments against the principle of the co-responsibility levy.

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): My right hon. Friend will agree that producers, particularly the hard-pressed cereals producers, will want to know what effect this will have on prices for the coming year. Can he give a forecast of what he expects the price increase will be? While I am glad to hear him restating his opposition to the co-responsibility levy, may I ask him to explain how that squares with his support for stabilising penalties?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend will know that it is not possible at this stage to predict what market prices will be this year because, being market prices, they will depend on a whole range of market factors. But the fact that MCAs now on cereals in this country are minus 2·6 per cent., compared with minus 32 per cent. only two years ago, is a major contribution that this price review has made, in addition to the improvement in crop support prices as a result of the green rate changes.

As for his question about stabilisers, my hon. Friend and I have had battles on that issue in the past. It is essential for the future stability of our cereal farmers that we get on top of the surpluses and ensure that the cereals sector does not absorb ever-rising amounts of taxpayers' expenditure. That is the point of the stabiliser. I believe that the mechanism of the stabiliser on support prices was the right way to tackle it and that it should not have been encumbered by a co-responsibility levy as well. That is why I am endeavouring to get rid of that.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale) *rose*——

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives) *rose*——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Harris.

Mr. Banks: Fair do's.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I said that I would call hon. Members who had been rising, not those who have suddenly decided to put a question.

Mr. Hood: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During Scottish Question Time, when Scottish Members complained about English Tory Members being called——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Was the hon. Gentleman rising before I said that I would call hon. Members who had previously been rising?

Mr. Hood: I was putting a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Was the hon. Gentleman rising previously? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Order. Was the hon. Gentleman rising previously?

Mr. Hood: No, I was not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will, as I said, call those who were rising.

Mr. Hood: I agree that I was not rising, Mr. Speaker, but——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I order the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. Mr. Harris.

Mr. Harris: Will my right hon. Friend be not deflected from the excellent work that he is now doing by the unholy alliance in this House represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? Will he carry on in the reforming way in which he has approached these matters? Will he accept congratulations, given the squeeze on farm incomes, for the extra £155 million that our

[Mr. Harris]

farmers will gain from this settlement, and in particular for the pending abolition of the co-responsibility levy on milk, which will mean a tremendous amount to milk producers in the south-west of England?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right about the important step that has been taken in the Council for many south-west of England dairy farmers. For many of them in the less-favoured areas there will be no co-responsibility levy on milk from now on. That is an important step forward and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that the whole of agriculture will have noticed the frivolity with which Opposition Members treat these matters—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—the frivolity on the Opposition Back Benches, compared with the serious approach and questions that have been asked by my hon. Friends.

Mr. Hood: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your protection. Is it right for the Minister, from the Dispatch Box, to accuse me of frivolity when I am only exercising my democratic right to ask him a question?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was here earlier and heard what I said.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): What is the anticipated impact of green pound devaluation on the competitive basis of United Kingdom producers in relation to EC producers, and why has the marketing year been changed?

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad to say that, as a result of action even earlier than these price negotiations, we managed to secure a nil MCA in the pigmeat sector, so that it is now in a fair and competitive situation. The change in the marketing year is a sensible move designed to bring it into line with the starting date of the marketing year for the cereals sector, given that cereals play a prominent part in the costs of the pigmeat sector in terms of feed costs and so on.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend accept the thanks of farmers in my area for his sterling work on the green pound in particular and on the co-responsibility levy? Will he continue to bear in mind the problems of young milk producers such as my constituent, Mr. Derek Lomax?

Mr. MacGregor: I assure my hon. Friend that I recognise the problems and discuss them often with the farming community. There is a general recognition in the farming community of the problem and an acceptance that this is one of the inevitable penalties of a quota system. On the other hand, there are divided views on how it should be tackled. At every meeting that I have been to, when I have tried to see if there was a majority view, it was difficult to find one. Siphoning offers the best prospect but, as my hon. Friend will know, many in the farming community are not in favour of that.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I too should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend on his considerable achievements in pushing the British argument in Europe. May I now exhort my right hon. Friend to use his considerable powers of persuasion to influence his colleagues in Europe to phase out intervention, which is carried on at horrific cost, which is wide open to abuse and which is of doubtful benefit to producers or the customers they serve? Undoubtedly, the money could be used to much better effect if it was channelled more directly to farmers.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that we should try to bring intervention back to its original objective as an ultimate safety net and not as an alternative market outlet. We are making progress, because two modest further steps towards that end were taken this year, in relation to the intervention period and the monthly increments.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): My right hon. Friend's achievements will be particularly appreciated by Pembrokeshire beef and dairy farmers, whose income has been depressed in recent years. Will my right hon. Friend do one further thing for them? Will he continue to press for an increase in the 90-steer headage limit, which would be greatly appreciated?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, we had a major battle on that last year, culminating in the Agriculture Council in January. I managed to negotiate the steer headage limit up from the original proposal, which was well below the limit of 90 that we eventually achieved. I will obviously come back to the charge on this, but it is one area where I am in a minority, not quite of one but nearly, so it will be a major battle to get any improvement.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his tenacity at the negotiating table? When he begins the important review of the milk quota system, will he put the transferability of quotas high on the agenda? Bearing in mind the effects of last year's drought on world prices, has not enough been saved in export subsidies to abolish the irrelevant milk co-responsibility levy altogether in 1991?

Mr. MacGregor: I am working to get the milk co-responsibility levy abolished. Ideally, I should like to see that happen next year; certainly I hope that we shall make progress on it next year. On transferability, I have been arguing for some time that we need greater flexibility. I can assure my hon. Friend that I have already told the Commission that I hope that it will come forward with proposals on that in the study to which it is now committed.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Bennett.

Mr. Tony Banks: He has been called already.

Mr. Hind: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the package that he has negotiated, which will be welcomed very much by west Lancashire farmers. In the light of the fact that the British farmer will have a greater competitive edge than in the past, will my right hon. Friend be very vigilant in looking for hidden subsidies that are developed by foreign farmers and producers, particularly as we have seen in relation to gas for the Dutch tomato industry? It appears that the Dutch potato processing industry is benefiting in the same way.

Mr. MacGregor: We are always vigilant in pursuing any issues where it looks as though there are unfair state aids. I have to put the emphasis on "unfair" because some aids are permitted within the system and we make use of them ourselves. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are vigilant where there is evidence of unfair aid. We take that up with the Commission because the prime responsibility for dealing with it lies with the Commission.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I offer my congratulations and those of dairy farmers in my constituency to my right hon. Friend. In sorting out the insecurity of the future, will my right hon. Friend's Department hurry up in making a decision about green-top milk? Many of the dairy farmers in my constituency who are involved in this area—who wonder why people are allowed to buy cigarettes and possibly catch cancer—will have nothing to do in future if green-top milk is not available.

Mr. MacGregor: Without going into the issues today, I can tell my hon. Friend that we have been receiving responses to our consultation document. We shall be assessing those responses carefully and in due course we shall make a statement about our position.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall take one question from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to represent the consumer, in the place of the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

Mr. Tony Banks: You are a toff, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the Secretary of State that what the farmers of Newham want to know is, how many of his right hon. and hon. Friends sitting behind him have personally benefited from what he has been able to negotiate? Does he not think that in future it would be far better if Conservative Members declared an interest before they asked a question?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the farmers of Newham would tell the hon. Gentleman that I am the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and not the Secretary of State.

Mr. Banks: Do not worry: you will make it.

Mr. MacGregor: That indicates how deeply involved the hon. Gentleman is in these matters.

I am certain that the farmers of Newham would applaud the fact that we have done a great deal this year to put the United Kingdom farmer on a completely competitive basis. I should have thought that the whole House and the whole country would welcome that.

Points of Order

4.37 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I raise a point of Table Office practice rather than "Erskine May"? A malicious habit has grown up among Ministers—one in particular—of claiming that she or he has answered questions when, in fact, no answer has been given. Yesterday, I had oral Question 92, which, alas, was not reached. It asked the Prime Minister whether Sir Leon Brittan cleared with No. 10 Downing street——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question was not reached. The hon. Gentleman cannot ask it now.

Mr. Dalyell: It is not what you might expect, Mr. Speaker; it is rather different. The Prime Minister claimed that she had answered many times on this subject, but she had not. She could not have.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order for me in that? I am not accountable for the answers that are given to questions.

Mr. Dalyell: The point of order concerns a matter of Table Office practice and why the Table Office refuses questions that ask Ministers for specific references as to where they have answered questions that they claim to have answered. It is a matter for the Table Office. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, cannot make decisions now, but would you reflect on the matter for 24 hours and ask the Table Office and colleagues what should be done about references which have been properly asked for by parliamentary Questions?

Mr. Speaker: I will reflect.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before I give my point of order, may I thank you for calling me a second time on the statement? Obviously, my first question was not very memorable.

Could you confirm that hon. Members who wish to ask questions about statements, such as the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), should be present to hear the statement?

Mr. Speaker: Let us not start a debate, but listen to what I say about the matter from the Chair.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you ensure that the record of *Hansard* shows that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food referred to Opposition Back-Bench questions as frivolous? As one of them was a question from me about the serious fraud and cheating that is going on in the CAP, it is important that people outside should know that the Minister does not take a serious attitude towards that important subject.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You probably know that, over a period, a group of us on the Opposition Back Benches have complained in the proper quarter about the fact that we cannot hear properly because the acoustics of the chamber is not good. Very understandably, it was put to us that little could be done about it. However, the whole thing is made worse when Ministers, especially junior Ministers, pirouette—they talk not to the House, but turn round. Today was a prize example. It is foolish of them to behave in that way. Can we get an instruction to Ministers, especially junior Ministers, not to pretend that they are playing, for example, David Lloyd George?

Mr. Speaker: I am well aware of the problem with the acoustics. The right hon. Gentleman has drawn my attention to something which I already know about. The microphones have recently been replaced. Ministers should speak into them, and the whole House would then hear.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

Pembroke (Mr. Bennett). My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) represents a distinguished agricultural constituency and has had a horse named after him, unlike Conservative Members. He was present during the statement made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Even if my hon. Friend did not rise to speak, the hon. Member for Pembroke should withdraw his slur on him.

Mr. Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman was present and I am sorry that I could not call him. We have a very busy day ahead of us.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): For the benefit of Conservative Members, I have a constituency covering 1,000 square miles with a major agricultural— *[Interruption.]* I know more about the problems of farmers.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman had been rising, I would have called him.

Early-Day Motions

4.46 pm

Mr. Dobson: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday you said that you would consider points of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) about early-day motions. I wonder whether you have had the opportunity to consider them yet.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

I have now completed my consideration of the matter the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) raised, but I do not consider that I need to make any definitive statement, since I made my general position clear yesterday in dealing with points of order. I can only repeat that a motion must be capable of debate and not just an attempt, in whatever form, to write statements or outside speeches, documents, or summaries of them, into the House's records. No doubt the Table Office will refer to me any motions which appear to offend against those criteria and I will then make my decision in the ordinary way as to whether they can be allowed to appear on the Notice Paper.

I remind hon. Members that, where a draft motion is disallowed, it is not in order to refer to it in the Chamber on a point of order, in the same way that disallowed questions may not be referred to in those circumstances.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 12 MAY

Members successful in the ballot were:
Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes
Mr. Tom Clarke
Mr. Robert Boscawen

BILLS PRESENTED

Licensing Amendment (Scotland)

Mr. Jimmy Hood, supported by Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. John McAllion, Mr. Frank Doran, Mr. Jimmy Wray, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Sam Galbraith, Mr. James Wallace, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Allan Stewart, Mr. George Galloway and Dr. John Reid, presented a Bill to make provision for the control and authorisation of sales from off-sale premises of alcoholic liquor: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 May and to be printed. [Bill 128.]

Requirements of Writing (Scotland)

Mr. Allan Stewart, supported by Sir Hector Monro, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith and Mr. Bill Walker, presented a Bill to reform the law of Scotland with regard to the requirement of writing for certain matters and the formal validity of contractual and other documents and presumptions relating thereto; to abolish any rule of law restricting the proof of any matter to writ or oath and to abolish the procedure of reference to oath; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 May and to be printed. [Bill 127.]

Waste Recycling (Paper)

4.48 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to promote the collection and recycling of waste paper.

Every year 90 million trees are chopped down to cater for Britain's demands for paper and board. Apart from the huge bill to import 90 per cent. of that raw material, it is estimated that 25 per cent. of the paper recycled in Britain is also imported. I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) for providing figures for 1988 produced by the Department of Trade and Industry today which show that the import bill for paper and paperboard was more than £3 billion, the import bill for pulp was £716 million, and the import bill for recycled waste paper—used copies of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, perhaps—was £9 million.

The percentage recycled is due to rise further when two new paper mills designed to use waste paper for the production of newspapers come into use. At the moment, less than 20 per cent. of domestic and commercial newspaper waste is recycled. If we are to cut the import bill significantly and keep those new mills operating on domestic recycled paper alone, the figure will have to increase to more than 40 per cent.

My Bill places a statutory duty on local authorities to draw up an approved scheme for recycling waste paper in their area. It also makes it compulsory for paper and board products to indicate on them whether or not they contain a specific percentage of recycled paper. Many local authorities, such as my own, the Wyre borough in Lancashire, already operate schemes. I want more and better schemes to be brought forward to enable the paper manufacturing industry to use ever increasing amounts of recycled paper from domestic and commercial sources in this country.

My Bill deals with the demand for recycled paper, as well as how it is collected in the first place. It is up to individuals, businesses and the public sector to create the demand for recycled paper. My Bill is designed to encourage them to do so. I also hope that other Government Departments will follow the lead of the Department of the Environment and start to use recycled paper. I have written to all Secretaries of State asking if their Departments will follow the example of the Department of the Environment. Closer to home, I hope that hon. Members will soon be communicating with their constituents on recycled paper. I shall shortly be in touch with the appropriate authorities to see how best that can be achieved. Within the Palace of Westminster, we produce a considerable amount of waste paper, as can be seen by a visit after lunch to the Library, where the wastepaper bins are full of waste paper which could be re-used.

I hope that businesses, particularly newspaper offices, which consume a considerable amount of newspaper and general paper products, will also consider using recycled paper. Some newspapers, though not all, are already printed on recycled paper. I hope that in future all will be. It is particularly important that paper products which are used only once, such as cleaning cloths and newspapers, which have a relatively short life, are made from recycled material. It is a great waste for such products to be produced from raw pulp.

It is also important that the demand for lower grade recycled paper should be increased, because most recycled material falls into that category. There is not yet a sufficient demand for lower grades of recycled paper to deal with the supply that is undoubtedly available. Germany and the United States have had quite sophisticated collection procedures for waste paper for some years. Unfortunately, those have not worked as well as they should, simply because the demand for the end products has not been there. One reason for the glut of waste paper in the United States and the fact that it is exported to this country is that there is not sufficient demand for the products that can be produced from it.

In presenting the Bill I hope that members of the Press Gallery will not report these proceedings in an over-lengthy fashion. I hope that they will not resort to the device—recently employed by a well-known Sunday newspaper which says that it is environmentally conscious—of printing a special weekday edition to publicise a particular subject.

This Bill, like the Unleaded Petrol (Engine Adjustment) Bill that I introduced under the same procedure last year, focuses on a particular area of environmental improvement—in this case, the minimisation of waste. That strikes a sympathetic chord in a great many people in this country. In the past, we have been described as a nation of hoarders—until recently we tended to frown on our American cousins, who were depicted as throwing everything away—and the general public are sympathetic to the idea of recycling items that have already been used.

Waste minimisation must be a central theme of any responsible policy towards the environment because it encourages the prudent use of the world's natural resources, while polluting the environment as little as possible. By collecting and using recycled waste paper we cut our energy needs, we preserve the world's forests and we encourage a tidier Britain. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Keith Mans, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Mr. Julian Brazier, Mr. James Paice, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. Anthony Coombs, Mr. David Tredinnick, Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. James Arbuthnot, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. David Nicholson and Mr. Hugo Summerson.

Waste Recycling (Paper)

Mr. Keith Mans accordingly presented a Bill to promote the collection and recycling of waste paper; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 129.]

Orders of the Day

Social Security Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 7

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT: REQUIREMENT TO SEEK EMPLOYMENT ACTIVELY

4.53 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 5, line 1, leave out clause 7.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments : No. 109, page 5, line 5 at end insert—

'(2A) A claimant may show that he is actually seeking employment under subsection (1) above if he is working in a voluntary capacity in order to further skills and experience for future employment.'.

No. 14, in page 5, line 28 at end insert—

'(2C) if on a day for which benefit might fall to be payable, a person is a volunteer, then the Benefit Officer shall regard the voluntary work undertaken as evidence tending to show that the person is available for and actively seeking work.

(2D) A person shall be deemed to be available for and actively seeking work if that person provides continuous care and support as a volunteer to another person under an agreement with

(a) the other person;

(b) a public authority; or

(c) a voluntary organisation.

(2E) For the purposes of (2D) above, "voluntary organisation" means a body which is not a public body but whose activities are carried on otherwise than for profit.'.

Mrs. Beckett: The amendment seeks to delete Clause 7. I propose to confine my remarks to our amendment and not to discuss the other two with which it is grouped—not because I do not sympathise with the motives of those who tabled the other amendments, but because they cover issues that we discussed in Committee and I want to talk about clause 7 as a whole rather than seek to amend it.

The amendment seeks to delete the clause because it is not merely objectionable and profoundly damaging: it is unnecessary. It paves the way for the infliction of considerable and direct distress which we believe will follow the passage of this legislation. That distress will be caused and exacerbated by the fact that the proposals in the clause are rooted in the collective gut instinct of the Government and their Back Benchers that the unemployed are responsible for their unemployment—that they caused it, that they could end it fairly easily if only they really tried, and that their unemployment, rather than being a symbol of society failing them, is a symbol somehow of their success at exploiting others.

That gut instinct in Conservative Members has triumphantly survived all the evidence to the contrary and even the most glaring and obvious gulf between the number of people seeking work and the number of jobs available to them. Today, some Conservative Members may well go through the form—I expect that the Minister will—of denying that in their heart of hearts they think that all the unemployed are workshy, but even those who make that denial drift with amazing speed away from the formal assurances that only a tiny minority need the spur of the Bill towards discussing that tiny minority as if they constituted all the unemployed. I do not recall the Secretary of State for Social Security or the Secretary of State for Employment stressing in their speeches trailing this legislation at the Conservative party conference that only a tiny minority might be abusing the system.

I should make it crystal clear, so that no one will have any excuse for asking spurious questions, that my hon. Friends and I believe that people who have to be available for work—and who do not suffer from some disabling illness or whose family responsibilities do not keep them away from work—and who are drawing benefit should be looking for work. That is what the law says; it has stood unamended for 60 years; we have always supported it, and we do today.

We do not accept, however, that the law needs to be substantially amended and tightened as the clause suggests. We differ from some Conservative Members, because although we accept the framework of the law as it stands we are concerned about the way in which it may be exploited in its day-to-day administration to harry people off the unemployment register with no serious attempt being made to address the fact that they cannot find suitable work. Nevertheless, our amendment deals with the framework of the law, not with the use that is being made of it.

If the Government's argument is that the law is being broken or exploited, the answer is to enforce it and to use the remedies provided in it—which, heaven knows, are savage enough—not to introduce new and unneeded concepts.

Although we believe that the present law can potentially be misused, we are quite certain that the use —never mind the misuse—of the new law that the Government propose has enormous potential for causing untold misery and humiliation for those who are or become unemployed.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that this clause offers the opportunity for such humiliation. We believe that it might happen even if it is unintended. In the best possible case, if an unemployed person is looking for work and that work is available and not difficult to find, irritation and perhaps even distress will be caused because the provision will be unnecessary. It will be seen as a bureaucratic nuisance—an interference and a diversion from the serious business of finding another job. For those for whom the prospects of the search for work are not a matter of minor disturbance but of major difficulty, the clause will have a more seriously damaging effect. It requires that the unemployed person should provide on a week-to-week basis an account of all the steps he has taken in each week to look for work. That was made quite clear in Committee. It will not be enough to apply for, say, 17 jobs in one week and to do nothing in the following week. The whole point of the clause is that the search should be a continuing one, not that it should be averaged out over a period.

The Minister of State even made it explicit in Committee that an unemployed person who has the opportunity to benefit from a family holiday—perhaps arranged by one of the charitable organisations—will not be excused from continuing his job search in that week or weeks, and that failure on return from holiday to convince the local office that the job search had continued, could lead to the withdrawal of all rights of benefit.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I am sure my hon. Friend also remembers that the Minister said that anyone attending a funeral away from his home would be expected to prove that he was actively seeking work while attending the funeral.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right to remind us that the Minister could not agree that even such circumstances should exclude people from job search.

What primarily concerns us is the harm that this unnecessary proposal may inflict particularly on three groups—those who are, for whatever reason, long-term unemployed; those who suffer from a sickness or disability which is not only distressing in itself, but handicaps their search for work; and the young homeless, who will have special difficulty combining the search for work with the search for a roof over their heads and who, for that reason, may be particularly unacceptable to employers.

In these debates Conservative Back Benchers have tended to raise a series of ridiculous objections which we have had to knock down. We recognise that the technique of keeping and discussing a log of job search activity and methods may have some value for some people, whose main problem is not the lack of available work or an inherent mismatch between their skills and capacity and the jobs on offer, but some hitherto unrecognised defect in the methods and approach of job search. No doubt those are the kind of people who are helped by a job club.

But Ministers know perfectly well that many assiduous attenders and participants at job clubs do not find work because the difficulties that they face cannot be resolved just by correcting their search techniques and are entirely outside their power to resolve—difficulties such as there just not being enough jobs or their not being offered the jobs that there are.

5 pm

Those are the people for whom being compelled to keep a log, to reveal its contents, to discuss it—no matter how sympathetic the hearer—means, by definition, a compulsion to chart, record, justify, explain and apologise for failure. That must be so, by definition, because the people who succeed will not have to do it any more.

The Government know, as we know, that not just hundreds but hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, will be charting failure, because, in spite of anecdotal evidence about jobs here or there or somebody whose friend had a job on offer for which no one applied, the overwhelming evidence is that, on the Government's own figures, there remain at least 2 million to 3 million people for whom there is no work. Even if the number of vacancies and unemployed people could ever be brought to match, they will never match in terms of skills, abilities and capacity.

We ask the Government just this once to think again; to use their imagination. By the law of averages, some Conservative Members must have some. The long-term unemployed already live—in many cases with great difficulty—with the fact that our society regards them as failures. They already live with the fact—most with great difficulty—that many of their fellow citizens tacitly or openly blame them for their condition, especially those who have never been unemployed and imagine that it is easy to do something about.

The people who care for the mental health and stability of the unemployed have long sought to advise them not to give up, not to drop out, but to do their best to adjust to their circumstances in ways that allow them to maintain their self-confidence and their self-regard because, apart from anything else, that is likely to increase their chance of finding a job in the circumstances in the town in which they find themselves or in one where they can realistically look for work. Under clause 7 they will be forced up against their defects or their lack of success, but in any event their failure, week after week after week.

That will also apply to the already more evidently vulnerable—the army of those with some disability whom the Department's doctors in their wisdom have ruled to be fit for light work, sometimes in the face of strenuous opposition from the person's own general practitioner. Some are already being caused distress by being put through the restart process because often there is no light work available and even more often, employers are unwilling to hire them for that light work if it exists. Like others now required to be available for work, in future those people, too, will have to prove what steps they have taken every week, week in, week out, on holiday or not on holiday, to search for that light work.

Let me remind the House that for all those affected by this legislation, the fact that they have to be available for work does not necessarily mean that they are getting any money. They may be signing on only to maintain their pension credits. Some may have worked for 30 or 35 years but still not have enough credits to satisfy the long period of contributions or credits required to qualify for a full pension. If they are ruled not to be actively seeking work, they will lose those credits and perhaps their right to a full pension, even though they may have spent what most of us would consider a full working life in employment and become injured or sick or made redundant towards the end of that working life. Are even this Government prepared to make that group jump through hoops to satisfy the prejudice of the ignorant and the comfortable who tend to call the unemployed "these people"?

What I have described is the law as it will be unless the House carries the amendment. The Minister says that matters will not be as bad as that in practice, not because that is not what the law says but because it will be sympathetically administered. It might be, and then again it might not be. Recent social security legislation is riddled with examples of cases where Ministers have assured us that in practice there will not be any problem, but that turns out not to be quite the case.

But in this case the problem is that the rigidity is in the law. It is on the face of the Bill. The Bill says that the test, abolished as long ago as 1930 because of its harshness and injustice, should be applied every week on a week by week basis.

Now that unemployment benefit is paid in arrears, those ruled not to be actively seeking work will lose their benefit for the two weeks at the end of which the judgment is being made. The chances must be extremely high that they will not be able to satisfy whoever has ruled them not to be actively seeking work that they are now actively seeking work for at least another two weeks. The chances are high that anyone who falls foul of the test will lost all right to benefit and possibly all source of income for, at the minimum, a month.

The clause is savage in its potential, it will be savage in its effects and it will lead inexorably to harassment and persecution of some whose only fault is that they cannot

[Mrs. Beckett]

get work. I beg hon. Members on both sides of the House to vote for the amendment and for the removal of the clause.

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): I shall not follow the line taken by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) in calling for the removal of clause 7. I want to speak to amendment No. 14 in my name and the names of right hon. and hon. Members of the all-party disablement group. The amendment seeks to take account of the special situation facing people who work as volunteers in our society.

We talk a lot these days about care in the community policies and we are all anxious that the Government should soon bring forward their decisions on the Griffiths report, the report of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. But regardless of those factors, we have to recognise that during recent years of high unemployment the Government have actively encouraged unemployed people to become active citizens through community care work.

The voluntary organisations on which we rely for a great deal of our social provision have become heavily involved in using unemployed volunteers in community care. Organisations such as the Spastics Society, Age Concern, MIND and Mencap run everything from local befriending schemes to specialist day centres with volunteers who are expected and trained to develop close relations with those for whom they care and to develop a special trust with the persons cared for.

There are some 370 volunteer bureaux in the United Kingdom, recruiting about 110,000 new volunteers every year. Their average age is 29, and about 60 per cent. are women. Between one quarter and one third of the population take part in some kind of regular voluntary work.

Unemployed people are a significant proportion of volunteers and among the most active and energetic. They are used in all the caring professions from advice work through citizens advice bureaux, housing aid centres and law centres through to community care agencies, working with elderly people, people with disabilities, mental illness and mental handicap and homeless people and ex-offenders.

Hospitals, homes for children and old people, conservation work and many worthwhile environmental projects make up a pattern for which Britain is unique. They rely largely on voluntary help.

At present, under the existing system, volunteers face a number of difficulties in claiming benefits to which they are entitled, and because benefit officers have a great deal of discretion in deciding on the position of a volunteer, there are many inconsistencies of practice across the country. My amendment has the backing of all the voluntary organisations and seeks to provide the necessary clarity and uniformity of practice.

Clause 7 provides that unemployed persons will have to show that they are actively seeking work, and I do not dissent from that principle. But if the clause is not amended there may be serious problems for a great many volunteers. Benefit officers may, in many cases, conclude from the fact that a person is volunteering that he is not actively seeking work—a misunderstanding which has been common under the present system. Volunteers who are actively seeking work, but whose voluntary work involves caring for people with whom they must build up trust and commitment, surely cannot be expected to break off that trust and commitment within 24 hours. They must be given longer notice, both to protect the disabled or other persons being looked after, and to give sufficient time for the various local authority and voluntary organisations to arrange for other volunteers to come forward to ensure continuous care.

Disabled people form a strong and supportive personal relationship with their volunteer carers. These are mutually beneficial. Crucially, these personal elements of care depend on a relationship of trust, care and familiarity, built up over a period. If a volunteer is forced to break off that relationship at 24 hours' notice, emotional and practical difficulties for the disabled person will be created. The voluntary caring organisations—the Spastics Society, Mencap and so on—will not have sufficient time to arrange cover by another carer. Our amendment would ensure that this special relationship was protected from the effects of benefit requirements designed to address a totally different problem.

It would also ensure that the special position of volunteers and volunteering was recognised, within the benefit system, as an important way into the job market. Volunteering is an important form of training by which skills are acquired and a person made more employable. Many people who have taken on volunteer roles have moved on into professional caring jobs, having gained the necessary skills in their volunteering relationships with disabled and other people.

I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security is right in his promotion of community care and active citizenship, but it would be sad indeed if one of the unintended consequences of this legislation were the disruption of the supporting relationships built up in the community. That would, of course, be another push to the already spiralling residential care budget.

There are precedents for recognising the contribution of volunteering. Social security regulations of 1983 allow those involved in emergency services to be counted as actively seeking work. The proposed subsections (2C) and (2D) in amendment No. 14 simply seek to extend this recognition to an equaly important area of volunteering, where people are similarly concerned with the life and death of others unable to assist themselves. The proposed subsection (2C) states:

"if on a day for which benefit might fall to be payable, a person is a volunteer, then the Benefit Officer shall regard the voluntary work undertaken as evidence tending to show that the person is available for and actively seeking work."

I do not believe that I am going against the grain of Government policy with this amendment. Indeed, I believe that I am correcting an oversight. I know that my hon. Friend values the work of the internationally and nationally respcted organisations that have asked for it, and I hope, therefore, that he will give us some encouragement when he replies.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I listened very carefully to the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam). The thrust of his amendment certainly does not go against the grain of Government policy. Similarly, amendment No. 109, which is part of this group, seeks to move with the grain of Government policy. Its purpose is to allow claimants to

show that they are seeking employment under subsection (1) if they are working in a voluntary capacity in order to further skills and experience for future employment. That seemed to be the nub of the argument by the hon. Member for Exeter, and it is the thrust of the brief remarks that I want to make.

Related matters were given some consideration in the Standing Committee. I wonder whether the Minister of State has had time to give further consideration to, and to develop, Government thinking in this direction. Problems could be solved, and benefits accrue, from these amendments. I certainly support the purpose of amendment No. 1—the lead amendment in this group—for reasons that I made clear on Second Reading and in Committee. The thrust of clauses 7, 8 and 9 is wrong-headed, and I remain unconvinced that they are necessary at all. However, I accept that the Government have set their face against any attempt to withdraw those clauses, so the best course that the House can adopt is to seek to amend them positively. The amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Exeter and the amendment in my name both seek to do that in a constructive way.

5.15 pm

The new provisions will certainly have an effect on voluntary organisations and charitable organisations, which do very good work—a point that is of crucial importance. But perhaps even more important is the effect of the new legislation on the people who will be unable to continue to claim unemployment benefit, people who in the past were doing voluntary work. I am particularly concerned about people with disabilities. They are in a "Catch 22" situation. Although attempts are being made to encourage employers to take on quotas of people with disabilities, those people are in a very difficult situation in the employment market.

Many disabled people can make a very positive contribution to society as a whole in terms of the organisations with which they work as volunteers, but they also benefit in terms of the personal development that they can achieve and the confidence that they can re-establish by serving in a useful capacity with organisations such as we in our constituencies know so well. Such people are in a vicious circle. Voluntary work gives disabled people an opportunity to acquire office skills, computer skills, and so on. It gives confidence and provides material for a practical curriculum vitae that can be shown to prospective employers. Paying unemployment benefit to volunteers like that constitutes an investment, and is not a subsidy for any sort of easy life.

The only other point that I want to make is that the long-term unemployed, too, could be helped very substantially if the Government were to accept these amendments. Anybody who has been unemployed for a long time loses confidence. That is clear to any hon. Member who has constituents in this situation. The air of defeat with which some people come to see me actually depresses me. If such people could be provided with constructive and helpful positions as volunteers while claiming unemployment benefit, they could be kept much more mentally alert. Very often they would be in the right place at the right time when job opportunities came along. Their voluntary work would show future employers that they were determined to get out and about and to try to improve their situation. It would keep their skills ticking over, and make possible the development of new skills if old ones had atrophied.

For all these reasons, the scheme that is proposed in these amendments, which seek to mitigate the effect of the new regime, are commendable. The opportunities are easily to hand to set up such as system. I am led to believe that the voluntary bureaux have worked out what I am fairly satisfied is a reasonably workable scheme. The Minister of State must not hide behind the difficulties of bureaucracy. That argument will not wash at all. The opportunity is readily to hand. There is no reason for resisting these amendments—certainly not on ideological or political grounds. They would provide substantial benefit to a significant number of people, and would go a long way to mitigating some of the disastrous effects that I suspect clauses 7, 8 and 9 may have if they are introduced unamended. I support the amendments in my name and in the name of the hon. Member for Exeter, and I hope that the Minister will give them very careful consideration.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) painted a picture of the economy in London that one does not recognise. She talked about the shortage of job opportunities. Just before coming to the House, I went out and bought a copy of the *Evening Standard*. I counted a total of 15 pages of job opportunity advertisements.

Ms. Short: Does that mean that there is a job for everybody?

Mr. Marshall: It means that, if one considers the number of registered unemployed and the number of job vacancies notified to jobcentres in London, and if one then applies the usual quotient, it becomes clear that there are many jobs available in London for those registered as unemployed. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) knows that a large number of jobs, particularly in the south-east, are not even notified to jobcentres because of the difficulty of filling them. For every vacancy notified to a London jobcentre there are probably three or four more waiting to be filled. One can say that in London there are about 100,000 vacancies available for people to fill.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): In the borough of Croydon, which includes the constituency of the Secretary of State for Social Security, there were in January 8,000 unemployed chasing 1,000 vacancies. Will the hon. Gentleman explain how all those people can obtain employment when there are insufficient jobs available? That pattern does not match the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, even in London.

Mr. Marshall: There is a strict convention. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that right hon. and hon. Members do not speak about the constituencies of other right hon. and hon. Members. I am sure that Mr. Speaker would not expect me to talk about his constituency.

Mr. Battle: He probably has the same problem in his constituency.

Mr. Marshall: The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) refers to 1,000 vacancies notified to Croydon jobcentres, but he knows full well that for every notified vacancy, there are three or four unnotified jobs available. The hon. Gentleman knows also that London is a

[Mr. Marshall]

travel-to-work area, so that people living in Croydon do not have to work in Croydon but can work somewhere else. Because of London's wide travel-to-work area, a whole host of jobs are available to Croydon residents—both in Croydon itself and outside it.

When I visited the Golders Green jobcentre in my constituency, I was told that about 800 vacancies were on offer, but great difficulty was experienced in filling many of them—mainly because people are unwilling to accept them because the salaries offered do not compare favourably with unemployment benefit. However, some people do those jobs at those salaries, and they pay taxes. Why should they pay taxes to provide unemployment benefit to people who refuse to undertake those same jobs? Opposition Members do not understand the anger that the situation creates among those in work.

Ms. Short: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman really understands what he has just said. He claims that some people refuse jobs because they would be financially worse off by comparison with the unemployment benefit they receive. He is saying, then, that people should accept jobs that will give them a lower income than they have from unemployment benefit. Does he really mean that? Are there to be no minimum employment standards in this country?

Mr. Marshall: If the hon. Lady listens to my remarks, or if she reads them in *Hansard* tomorrow, she will learn that, not for the first time, she has distorted the remarks of a Conservative Member. No one is saying that people should receive less income in work than they might receive in benefits. We introduced family credit to ensure that families in work are not worse off than families out of work. The hon. Lady seeks to distort our true intentions. Our belief is that it is wrong that people who refuse work should automatically receive unemployment benefit, which is a view taken by the vast majority of the British people.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I support all the amendments in the first group because they would allow the useful development of people undertaking voluntary work. Many Conservative Members, including the Minister, want to see more of that because they support voluntary effort in society. That is why a Conservative Member has tabled an amendment. I hope that the Minister accepts that voluntary work should be taken as evidence of a person's determination to seek employment.

I support the wholesale opposition of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to the noxious new clause giving the Secretary of State power to introduce regulations. When the Department introduces regulations, they are generally of an oppressive and complicated nature, hurt the poorest most and erode the civil liberties of those in the worst position in society.

I am not in favour of the Minister for Social Security having any additional regulating powers. All the cuts implemented after 11 April 1988 were introduced by regulatory powers. Large chunks of oppressive legislation afflicting the poorest of the poor were introduced by the Minister with minimal parliamentary scrutiny. I do not think that he is a fit or proper person to legislate for anyone. I am not in favour of him. I recall the years when he pretended to be a liberal in the Tory party, and how he sacrificed those pretensions to crawl after the Prime Minister for position.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): The hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark.

Mr. Cryer: I shall certainly not withdraw one dot or comma of what I have just said. The Minister is a particular object of my contempt for taking the position of being on the wet side of the Tory party but then, like a number of Tory party wets, caving in at the flick of an eyebrow by the Prime Minister. If anyone wants me to make the position absolutely clear, I shall be delighted to do so.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): It will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend that I entirely agree with his remarks. During the progress of the Bill last year which took away benefits from many young people, I pleaded with the Minister for a special dispensation for groups which he now admits are in dire need and sinking into homelessness and despair, but the Minister could not give a guarantee then that he would help them. I agree with every word that my hon. Friend has said about the Minister for Social Security.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has detailed knowledge of the exchanges that took place in Committee on that occasion.

The regulating powers available to the House are far from satisfactory. I am concerned about giving more time to primary legislation on the Floor of the House. If the Government were to withdraw the water privatisation Bill, for example, the House would have an opportunity to deal with more primary legislation, which is what it should be.

The availability for work test is an example of tried and tested legislation which has stood the test of time. When stories of benefits abuse arise, they are published mostly in the tabloid press and have little substance. I recall a press campaign during the last Labour Government's period of office, when they were accused of being soft on the unemployed and allowing benefits abuse. The evidence produced—which was supported, of course, by *The Sun*—was found to be almost wholly without substance. Of about 700 cases investigated, often arising from anonymous reports about neighbours, only four were found to have genuine substance, and were in any event already being investigated by the DHSS.

5.30 pm

One of the Government's faults is that they cannot leave anything alone. Because of their doctrinaire beliefs, they have to tamper with everything, and that doctrinaire belief is generally about attacking those who are most vulnerable. Labour Members accept the approach to availability for work that civil servants are used to administering. People applying for benefits also understand it. But now the position is to be changed and civil servants and applicants will have to make a new assessment of the position. New difficulties will be created, and any judgment to be made will be on the side of the Government, with the result that more people will be refused unemployment benefit. Guidelines will be issued by the Minister to supplement the delegated powers and will almost certainly instruct civil servants, in cases where a judgment has to be made, to decide against the applicant.

In discussions that I have had while canvassing over the years, people of previous generations have told me that they do not want to go back to the practices of the 1920s and 1930s, when the means test humiliated people genuinely seeking work. Labour Members canvassing in the last two elections often heard it said that the Prime Minister was taking us back to the 1920s and 1930s. Some of us thought that people who had had a hard time during the inter-war period might have been feeling that the situation in recent times was a rehash of the earlier experience and might perhaps be exaggerating slightly, but we were wrong because the Prime Minister is clearly taking us back to the 1920s and 1930s, when people were subjected to harrowing scrutiny and humiliation. That will be the effect on society of clause 7 of the Bill. That provision is a further attack on the unemployed.

The Government claim that the number of unemployed is falling, although it has not yet fallen to the number in 1979 when the Conservatives came to office. Conservative Members are always making comparisons with the situation under the Labour Government, but they have a long way to go to achieve an unemployment level as low as in 1979. It would be interesting to hear when the Government expect that figure to be reached. In the meantime, the unemployed are suffering under the legislation affecting them. Provisions protecting people against unfair dismissal have been diminished. The rights of an employer have been enhanced so that a person who is dismissed faces the possibility of an extended period without unemployment benefit. Industrial tribunals relating to unfair dismissals have had their jurisdiction removed or diminished.

All this is part of a general pattern to attack the unemployed. I have no doubt that, like all Labour Members, Members representing smaller parties have constituents who tell them that many of the jobs advertised are for skilled engineers and the like, so a person who has been a labourer all his life is unlikely to get one. People genuinely seeking work often despair at not being able to find a job. One of my own offspring applied for several jobs over a period of many weeks and was in despair when he was unsuccessful. Although it was for a relatively short period that he was unable to find a job—fortunately, he subsequently found a position—he showed the despair that people feel at the continued indifference of many employers to applications for work.

It will be difficult to clarify what is involved in a test of whether a person is actively seeking work. It will be extremely difficult to verify people's intentions. Will they have to show that they have written letters seeking employment? Will it thus be incumbent on them to make sure that they keep a carbon copy or take a photocopy of all their applications? Will they have to produce bus tickets to show that they visited places of employment to apply for jobs? If their application is refused, will they have to get a letter to that effect so as to continue receiving unemployment benefit?

Because of the great sea of legislation which already exists, people face the task of filling in a large number of forms in scrupulous detail to satisfy the Minister's civil servants and obtain benefits—a situation rather different from what people in the City seem to be able to get away with in relation to share applications, and so on. It is difficult to determine how much evidence people will need to produce under clause 7 in support of their applications for benefit. This will impose yet another burden on ordinary people who have already been rejected inasmuch as they are unemployed.

Recently I had an interview with a man who was made redundant two years ago. As he was 58 years old, he wondered what hope he had of getting a job. The Minister may say that changes are afoot which will mean older people being called back to work, but that does not apply now. In Bradford, the Tory-controlled council is actually creating redundancies by sacking people and forcing them on to the dole. Indeed, one of the Government's proud boasts is about the way in which they have got rid of civil servants. A further instance of unemployment being created is the closure of the shipyard at Wearside. The Government have no proud record of creating and sustaining jobs in the public sector, but rather the reverse.

Unemployment is still a serious social problem, with 2 million people on the dole. Many thousands of people have been put out of work by the reduction in manufacturing activity—a total of 2 million since 1979. Under this Government all those people still walking the stones have a shadow over their shoulders of yet more bureaucratic interference and form-filling. They will have to produce more proof of their efforts to find work and satisfy more civil servants to obtain unemployment benefit.

If the Minister wishes to redeem himself in my eyes and those of other Labour Members, he must accept at least one of the amendments—preferably amendment No. 1—to show that he has some sympathy for the unemployed. He needs to show that he accepts their collective word when they tell him that they are genuinely seeking work because 99·9 per cent. of those people are desperately looking for work, want work, and are critical of a Government who seem unable to produce an economy that will provide it.

Mr. Burns: I hope that the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) will forgive me if I do not take up the points he made, except to say that I do not believe the Bill, including clause 7, is an attack on the unemployed. If the amendment to clause 7, which is the centre of the Bill, were passed, it would completely emasculate the authority of the legislation by withdrawing from it the requirement actively to seek work in order to receive unemployment benefit. I see no reason why there should not be a clause requiring people actively to seek work in order to qualify for the benefit.

I agree with the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) that only a small minority in this country claim the benefit, are not working, do not want to work and would try to duck any job one gave them. However, we must not blow this fact up out of all proportion. The vast majority of people who are out of work want to work and are looking for jobs. The news that the unemployment figures are falling is certainly welcome, but it does not alter the fact that many people desperately want work.

I believe, however, that it is the duty of Government, of whatever party, to ensure that the money paid to people who are out of work goes to those who really want to work but cannot find a job, rather than to the small minority who have no intention of working and are on the benefits register simply because they see it as an easier alternative.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) sighs; but there are such cases. I am sure that, when they were canvassing for the last general election, hon. Members

[Mr. Burns]

heard the odd person—not loads of people of course—say, "Why should I work? I get x pounds a week in benefit, and if I were working I would probably not get as much as that." The Government have a duty to protect the taxpayer—and those in work—against such people. There is no reason whatever for an able-bodied person enjoying good health not to seek a job.

At present, just under 2 million people are unemployed, and there are between 600,000 and 700,000 vacancies. In Chelmsford, my constituency, 1,841 people are out of work and there are more than 700 vacancies. I believe that some of those vacancies could and should be filled. Companies in my constituency, such as Marconi Communications and the English Electric Valve Company, find it very difficult to get people to work for them. That is not because they are bad employers; they are certainly not that. It is because some people who are out of work could be working.

Mr. Battle: Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell us what house prices and rents are like in his constituency, near those factories? Might not the fact that people do not take up such job opportunities have something to do with the fact that they cannot afford to move their families from the north to the south?

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentlemen has a very valid point. The Housing Act, when it is in full operation, will help to create a right to let, and will build up the rented accommodation market. *[Interruption.]* I should be grateful if, having asked a question, the hon. Gentleman would listen to the reply before catcalling. I was not saying that people should come down from the north, because what he says is absolutely right: people do not want to come down to Chelmsford to work, particularly those in the north who are on lower incomes, because of the level of house prices. I was making the point that people already living in Chelmsford could take up work in companies that are suffering from a serious labour shortage.

A report published last year on the London labour market provides compelling evidence that thousands of jobs are available in the Greater London area for those who are out of work in that area, but they are not being taken up. I believe that clause 7 will encourage more people to take up such jobs. People who are genuinely and actively seeking work should have no worries, because they are already doing what the Bill, when enacted, will ensure that everyone does. If they are unsuccessful in their attempts to find jobs, they will receive the benefit to which they are entitled.

I shall oppose amendment No. 1 and support the Government. Bringing into benefit regulations a provision requiring that a person is actively seeking work is, in my view, long overdue.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I should like to discuss the whole clause rather than the amendments, which are clearly of some importance and value.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, south (Mrs Beckett) that the clause paves the way for more and more misery to be inflicted on people who are already experiencing poverty, dilemma and much else. It will make such people responsible for their own dilemma. Those of us who represent areas of high unemployment know very well that most, if not all, of those who are out of work are out of work not because of their own actions but because of the Government's economic strategy—a strategy designed not just to put people out of work, but to destroy the strength of the trade union movement and make it subject to the will of Government. That is all part of the Tory philosophy, and has been for some time.

5.45 pm

Mr. Burns: How can the hon. Gentleman blame the Government for all the people who are still out of work in Dundee as a result of the Transport and General Workers Union fiasco?

Mr. Michie: I do not wish to educate the hon. Gentleman. If he knew anything about industrial strategy and trade union politics, he would also know that it is necessary to plan for the future rather than living for the day. Protection of jobs and of the union is essential to the future of working people—although that, of course, is not something that the hon. Gentleman wishes to see.

Instead of using so much valuable time in trying to find a way to save a few bob at the expense of the poor, the Government should use legislation and powers to create real jobs and stop hounding people who are not unemployed for their own ends. Many of those people will be permanently on trial, week after week, as my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South has already pointed out. We are returning to the bad old days; in fact, things are worse. We put a stop to this kind of legislation years ago because it was too harsh, but we now see that the present Government's legislation is harder than some of the bad laws that were scrapped a long time ago.

In most cases, the difficulties experienced by claimants actively seeking work will not be a good enough reason to qualify for benefit. It will be difficult for a claimant to prove that he could not make it for one reason or another, and he could lose at least a month's benefit. Moreover, people with disabilities which are not always recognised will find it hard to prove that they are actively seeking work, if suitable work is available.

The same applies to those who are caring for the sick or the disabled. One of the amendments makes the point that the more someone tries to help others the more likely he is to jeopardise his chance of drawing benefit. I should have thought that that would be entirely against the Government's philosophy, but perhaps nothing is sacred in today's Tory-rotten world.

The people whom the Government intend to penalise are not lazy; most are helping others in a voluntary capacity—working hard for nothing at all. The fact is that suitable jobs are not there, despite what the Government say. Work opportunities in many areas are very scarce. Someone could have a full-time job applying for jobs that do not exist. I wonder whether a full-time job trying to find that elusive post of real consequence and of a reasonable standard would qualify a person for benefit.

The Government do not seem to understand the plight of many unemployed people. In many cases, there may not be a job opportunity in the area. That may not seem much of a problem to hon. Members on £24,000 a year plus expenses, who can get into a taxi whenever they like. Sometimes, apparently, they get on to tube trains and talk to members of the proletariat, but they do not do that very often. Hon. Members can all travel first-class on the train.

However, we are talking about unemployed people who do not have the money to apply for jobs in other areas.

What will happen if a single parent sees a poorly paid job four or five miles away? Can she afford to take it? Can she afford the hours away from her family or sick relative? Should she apply for the job knowing very well that she cannot take it, but if she does not apply for the job will she be penalised? We asked those questions time and again in Committee.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): We discussed the matter in Committee, and the hon. Gentleman must know that a lone parent with children under 16 is not required to be actively seeking work. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Michie: I did not catch that comical note.

Mr. Scott: I said that the hon. Gentleman must understand that a lone parent with children under 16 is exempted from that provision precisely because she is a lone parent.

Mr. Michie: I take the Minister's point.

Mrs. Beckett: In view of the Secretary of State's remarks about single parents being dependent on the State, when the Minister replies to the debate, will he tell us how long that happy circumstance might obtain? It is clear from my hon. Friend's remarks that many single parents wish to seek work and are trying to be active in the labour market but face these difficulties.

Mr. Michie: We discussed in Committee problems such as travelling to work and expenses, and I made that point that a four-mile journey in London is very different from a four-mile journey in Yorkshire or Derbyshire. The rules will apply throughout the country and will not change because people live in different areas, so, while I accept the Minister's point, I hope that he will realise that the Government have provided no help whatsoever for those people.

The Government have fallen for their own propaganda that there are plenty of jobs. The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) does not appear to understand the implications of the Bill. Because of the scrapping of the wages councils and protection against low pay, ultimately people will have to apply for extremely low-paid jobs and face the dilemma that they cannot afford to take the jobs but will be penalised by the DSS if they do not apply for them. The Government gave us no comfort in Committee to the effect that they would take that into consideration.

Mr. John Marshall: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those who might take the jobs to which he has referred would all be eligible for family credit, which would increase their incomes significantly?

Mr. Michie: I did not realise that the Government were so generous. I have written to the Minister about one or two cases of family credit, and I look forward to receiving his reply.

We have received no assurance that people who cannot afford to apply for jobs in certain areas will receive any help. I am afraid that the Government will have to come back in a year's time. They will not apologise for having made a mistake, but they will have the brilliant idea of helping some of those people to move.

Mr. Battle: Perhaps my hon. Friend should ask the Minister to apologise now. I am sure that the Minister would not want inadvertently to mislead the House. If a single person is claiming income support, the availability for work test will not apply, but if someone is claiming unemployment benefit, the test will apply. That should be made clear. I would not like the impression that the Minister was misleading the House to go further than the Chamber.

Mr. Michie: I am sure that the Minister will put the record straight somewhere at the end of his winding-up speech if he has enough time.

The people that we are trying to defend are the victims of a rotten system. They are unemployed through no fault of their own, yet they will carry the burden of guilt and will continually have to prove their innocence week after week. They are not scroungers or lazy, but simply finding it difficult to find work, but many of them will not have the opportunity to prove their case.

Clause 7 is a very bad clause designed by a powerful Government to bash the most vulnerable people. It is time that the Government used time and legislation to help those people instead of bashing them. They could start by scrapping clause 7, and if they want to be unnaturally generous to people in need, they should scrap the entire Bill.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I apologise to the House for not being present at the beginning of the debate as I was unavoidably detained.

I have an interest in clause 7 because I am a trustee of Community Service Volunteers and have been interested in the voluntary sector for a long time. It is clear that the Minister understands that the nature of unemployment varies considerably from person to person. Even in places such as my constituency, where there is no shortage of employment, a substantial proportion of those who are unemployed are psychologically incapable of taking a job, or even applying satisfactorily for employment. One of the most helpful ways of enabling those people to recover confidence and social skills is giving them the opportunity to work as a part-time or full-time volunteer with a voluntary organisation which is skilled and experienced at bringing the best out of such young people.

One example is the information bubble in Waterloo station which is manned by volunteers who have been given the job by Community Service Volunteers. Their task is relatively simple but becomes increasingly complex as the volunteers provide information about a wide variety of events in London, train timetables and so on, and it gives many people who have become socially isolated the chance to recover their self-confidence. Many of those young people have gone on to find perfectly satisfactory employment. The people who carry out that task vary enormously between people with advanced degrees to those who can barely read and write but are taught the job and manage to cope very satisfactorily.

Those people volunteer for two reasons—because they want company and support and because they know that such work is a way back into the employment market. I believe that they should be deemed to be actively seeking work because they are preparing themselves for work, and because the organisation for which they are working is perfectly willing to be quizzed about the people it employs in a voluntary capacity. That is particularly important, because some of those people could easily obtain a job as a street sweeper or another pretty solitary activity in many

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

parts of the country. But that could exacerbate the psychological isolation which those people—who are usually, but not always, young people—experience and render them unemployable in the medium and long term because eventually they will crack up and be unable to continue.

It is essential that amendment No. 14, or a similar amendment, be accepted. The Under-Secretary of State for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) has already said that he sees no serious difficulty in creating a system whereby the voluntary organisation set aside one day or half a day a week during which the individual would be expected to apply for jobs. It would be wrong for people engaged in voluntary activity under the auspices of a properly organised and caring organisation to be deemed not to be seeking work.

6 pm

Ms. Short: My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said that we were now getting to the guts of the Bill and the reason why it was introduced. That point was confirmed by the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). This is not a social security Bill, but an employment Bill. Its origins are in the Department of Employment and it seeks to further the Government's strategy of reorganising our labour market, which they have been working out for a considerable time. That reorganisation involves positively encouraging low-paid employment in our economy and lowering the protections and security in employment of workers. It has been, sadly and disastrously for many people and for the efficiency of the economy, an enormously successful strategy.

We now have 2 million more low-paid workers than in 1979 and, disgracefully and shockingly, 49 per cent. of people in employment are now low paid on the measure set down by the Council of Europe, which is the equivalent of £132 for a full working week. Clause 7 is intended to take that process further and to force more people to take even lower-paid and worse employment. Amendment No. 1 seeks to delete clause 7, but it is impossible to understand the purpose of clause 7 without considering clause 9.

Clause 7 will require those who become unemployed to prove, on a weekly basis, that they are actively seeking work. If they do not, they will be threatened with the loss of benefit for six months. Clause 9 removes any minimum conditions about the jobs offered, so people will be forced to take the jobs that remain vacant in jobcentres—in areas of high and low unemployment—because the pay and conditions are so disgraceful. People will be forced into those jobs. As employers realise that, the unemployed will be used as a battering ram to erode standards of employment. That is clearly the long-term strategy of the Government and the Bill will make the position much worse.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) did not intend, I am sure, to mislead the House, but he was wrong when he said that it was not the purpose of Conservatives to force people to take jobs that pay less than their benefits. The Opposition moved an amendment on that in Committee, but it was turned down by the Government and the hon. Gentleman did not vote for it; he supported the Government. Let everyone be clear that under the Bill, people will be forced to accept employment that pays less than the level of benefit to which they are currently entitled. That is what the hon. Gentleman voted for in Committee, but he may have forgotten.

We know that the Conservative Whips do not allow Conservative Members to contribute in Committee, but that does not mean that the hon. Member for Chelmsford might not have learnt a little from the debate. He said that, in Chelmsford, there were 700 vacancies and 1,800 people unemployed. Obviously, he has not learnt what we tried to explain to him—that vacancies do not wait for ever for the unemployed to fill them. There is an enormous turnover. If the hon. Gentleman goes back to the jobcentre, he will find that of those 700 vacancies, most have been there for a short time and that the overwhelming majority have been taken by people already in employment who are seeking improved conditions.

The chances are enormously high that many of the 1,800 people cannot apply for the 700 vacancies because they do not have the necessary skills. If there are highly skilled job vacancies that cannot be filled in Chelmsford, that is the fault of local employers for not supplying adequate training so that the jobs can be filled.

Mr. Burns: The two companies that I mentioned in Committee are bending over backwards to take on unskilled workers and are more than prepared to train them, so that they can learn the necessary skills. They realise that it is difficult to find skilled workers in the area. English Electric Valve had over 200 vacancies last year that it could not fill. As a good employer, it is more than prepared to train unskilled people to fill jobs, yet it still has difficulty in filling them.

Ms. Short: The next time I visit Chelmsford, I shall call into the jobcentre. As the hon. Gentleman may know, I attend to these matters in some detail. I visit jobcentres and study the labour market. Chelmsford is not an island. Unless it is quite different from the rest of the country, the description of the likely employment market I have given will apply to Chelmsford.

To hear Conservative Members speak, one would think that we did not already have benefit conditions that have been enormously tightened in recent years. People have to be available for work to obtain unemployment benefit, and the tests are rigorously applied. As a result of the Government's strategy which I have already explained, and because of the prejudices among Conservative Members, many new provisions have been introduced in recent years. When people first become unemployed they have to fill in a questionnaire of 22 questions as part of the availability for work test. Under the restart scheme, the unemployed are called in every six months and receive a letter saying that their benefits will be stopped unless they come for an interview. Before that interview, they have to fill in a questionnaire of 17 questions. Many of the unemployed take places in job clubs or on one-week restart courses after going through that frightening process.

Research shows that the majority of the unemployed believed that the schemes were compulsory and that if they had not accepted places on them, they would have lost their benefits. The unemployed are harassed now and are frightened into schemes that lead them nowhere. The unemployed want jobs and we all want them to have jobs and good training, but the Government are so obsessed

with reorganising the labour market and cutting wages that the schemes seek to lower wage expectations rather than give skills that enhance the employability of the individual and the competitiveness of our economy.

The only purpose of this change is that matters should become worse and the conditions tougher. Anyone who is close to unemployed people who go through the restart scheme knows how much fear there is already. In Committee, we gave many examples of people who were frightened and harassed by the process, including examples of many older workers who had worked from 14 to 50-odd and had been laid off in the great recession induced by the Tory Government when they came to power in 1979. They are harassed under the restart scheme and will be humiliated under the processes in the Bill.

I am especially concerned about unemployed people who seek to study under the 21-hour rule. People who do that are worthy of great admiration. They have the experience of being unemployed and of having to manage on little money, but they have the motivation to find a place at college and to take courses that enhance their employability and learning. The Government have already wiped out that opportunity for 16 and 17-year-olds. About 30,000 of them used to use the opportunity to acquire O and A-levels. I know constituents who went on to become graduates through that difficult route. Now about 300,000 older workers will be affected. I do not know the precise figures, because one cannot obtain them from the Department of Employment.

In Committee, the Minister said that he was sympathetic to that point. I pushed him for an assurance and he asked me not to push him further. I shall push him now because we want an assurance. It will be intolerable if people who seek to study while on benefits are prevented from doing so and forced into schemes such as employment training, which lead them into crass employment experiences and not into decent prospects of a job and enhanced employability. It is no good the Minister saying that social security does not exist so that people can be educated and trained. Employment training, the Government's main scheme for unemployed people, consists of people training while on social security benefits. I sincerely hope that the Minister will give us serious assurances that the regulations will explicitly provide that people who are studying under the 21-hour rule are allowed to continue to study despite the tighter regulations that are being introduced.

I add my support to the amendments that have been tabled to protect voluntary workers. The Bill presents a real danger that people who do voluntary work will be found not to be actively seeking work and that they will be penalised and lose their benefit because they sought to help their community when they were unemployed.

Taking up voluntary work can be an enormously successful strategy for getting a job. When people go to agencies in areas of high unemployment to seek advice about how they might get employment, they are constantly advised to look for voluntary work in the area in which they are interested because that will give them confidence and experience and when openings occur, they will get jobs. Many people have found employment in that way. If the Minister does not make some such provision, not only will much of the care that is provided to our communities be destroyed, but a valuable route into employment will also be destroyed.

This is a foul Bill and clauses 7 and 9 are an outrage. They will mean that lots of our people will be harassed and humiliated as happened in the 1930s. That is not an exaggeration because the parallels are close. The Bill will also mean that more and more of our people will be low paid. Low pay is not only bad for individuals—it is no use the Government talking about family credit, because only those with dependent children are eligible for family credit and many people without dependent children could be forced into a job that pays less than their benefit—but is enormously bad for the economy. It leads to a high turnover of labour, low investment and poor training. Britain will have no future as an economy that rests on low pay. However, more and more the Government's strategy is to restructure our economy in that way. That is bad for individuals and the future of the economy. Clauses 7 and 9 will make everything much worse for a lot of people.

The Chancellor and the Government talk about inducing a recession in our economy to deal with the problem of inflation and they hope that we will have a soft rather than a hard landing. That means that there will be another—and inevitable—increase in unemployment. Harsher conditions will be imposed, when it is inevitable that unemployment will start to increase again. I am afraid that that is the future we face.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I apologise to colleagues for having missed a quarter of an hour in the middle of the debate when I was in Committee upstairs. however, I am glad, even at this late stage, to be involved in the debates on this Social Security Bill, because I was involved with the preceeding two Bills and I was sorry to miss the Committee stage of this Bill.

I want to address my remarks not only to amendment No. 14 which has been tabled in my name, which was spoken to by the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and which is supported by the all-party disablement group, but also to the basic amendment, amendment No. 1, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). I support both, if that is not mutually exclusive.

I refer first to the position of volunteers. I have close contacts with the Spastics Society and with Mencap and am very much aware of the important role played by volunteers in such disablement groups. We must ensure that in its final form the Bill cannot be interpreted—much is open to interpretation—by people who do not fully appreciate that significance in such a way as to reduce the number of volunteers available or to lean on them to move in other directions.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) spoke of the enriching experience of being a volunteer and of the help that it gives in finding other work. Both those points are true. When the Minister replies to the points that have been made about volunteers, I hope that he will give an assurance not just that they can continue to be volunteers but that they will have to show that they are still actively looking for work because that could be a "Catch 22" for volunteers. If one is actively looking for work, that cuts across one's voluntary work, which would not be a satisfactory outcome. It would be better to have the wording suggested in amendments Nos. 109 or 14 to try to overcome that.

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

6.15 pm

I accept that amendment No. 14 may need to be tightened and that we may need definitions of the voluntary organisations. I can see difficulties, in that people might be able to create a voluntary organisation and one person might be able to become a voluntary organisation and "employ" an unemployed person as a volunteer. Given that the wording may need to be tightened, I hope that the Government will not rest their case just on the fact that, of course, people can continue to be volunteers but they must also show that they are actively looking for work because that would not be anything like satisfactory.

I turn now to clause 7. The area that I represent is extremely scattered. There are 93 villages in my constituency and some people may live 15 or 20 miles from their unemployment benefit office. If the expectation is that people will go to the office regularly to show that they are actively involved in seeking work, significant costs could arise. Indeed, trying to go to interviews or to knock on doors asking for a job also involves costs. People may live 10 miles from their nearest possible employer, there may well be no bus service and transport could be difficult. Many unemployed people will not have cars of their own because of their financial circumstances.

The question then arises, is writing a letter enough? It may be—I do not know. Other hon. Members who are present may also have received the letter that I received the other day from a young person in a hostel in Grimsby. It had clearly been written to more than one Member of Parliament and I know that another colleague has received the same letter. It was a one-liner, asking, "Have you got a job for me?" One's first instinct was, "What on earth does this guy think he is doing?" The second instinct, of course, was to give priority to that letter above a lot of others and to give a fairly substantive answer to explain why one does not. However, I wonder whether a one-line letter like that meets the requirements. If that is the case and we are to have an industry of turning out, cyclostyle, "Have you got a job for me?" letters, all that we are requiring to meet the provisions of the Bill is the cost of a stamp per week to show that one is seeking work.

That raises another problem, to which hon. Members have already referred, about employers' reactions. There is nothing more dismal or soul-destroying for somebody who takes the trouble to write a letter—not just a one-liner, but a substantive letter trying to get a job—than not even to receive an acknowledgement from the employer. I know that that happens far too often. If we are to tighten the system in the way that the Government want, there is a tremendous responsibility on employers to reply in substance to every letter they get. That should be the other side of the coin of these provisions. When people take the trouble to write such letters, a reply should be sent to them which can then be shown to any authorities that may want to see the evidence.

I welcome the part of the Government's provisions that will remove the disbarment of seasonal workers from receiving unemployment benefit after their third year of seasonal work. Where those rules are introduced, I hope that such workers will not be hit by the impossibility of finding work out of season or of finding even a job opportunity to which they could apply out of season. Unemployment in the Lleyn peninsula in my constituency reaches a high of 25 per cent. in winter but can come down to 10 per cent. in mid-summer. The difficulty is that people will need to prove, in mid-winter, that they are actively looking for work—that is, at the very time that no work is available. Therefore, we must ensure that we are not just changing the excuse for not paying unemployment benefit to those people who most certainly would like to work if work is available.

The hon. Member for Ladywood referred to the level of pay. There is a danger that people will be forced into working at low levels of pay. That danger could be significant. The other side of the coin to the tightening of the rules should be a move towards a national minimum wage policy. If people are driven to take work at a low level of remuneration because otherwise they would lose their benefit, vulnerable people may be exploited.

It seems clear from the evidence available to me that those who will have the greatest difficulty in showing that they are actively seeking work are those in the 50-plus group who have got into an almighty unemployment rut through no fault of their own, but because they have been caught by the recession, by structural changes that have taken place in industry and by the decline of many older industries; young people who do not have experience of life and who do not know how to go about obtaining work; and disabled people. For those three categories of people I am fearful about the effect of the Bill.

Inevitably, there will always be some who are working the system for their own benefit, but the overwhelming majority of people are not doing that. There are now possibly more people working the system than were doing so 10 or 15 years ago; they are in the habit of being unemployed because of unemployment—they are in a vicious spiral—and I favour any policy that helps them get back into work. But such help must mean the provision of dignified work, with people being helped and trained for work and not having the threat of being without a livelihood if they do not obey the letter of what is, as it stands, a rather unclear law.

I do not suppose that the Government will accept the amendment and delete clause 7, although I should support it if it were taken to a Division. I hope that between now and the Bill appearing in another place they will give careful thought to the points that hon. Members have made. I hope also that, when the Minister replies tonight, he will answer the questions that we have asked and will deal with the points that have been made about amendment No. 14 concerning volunteers, an issue of significance to many organisations.

Mr. Scott: It was common ground in Committee that unemployed people should have to seek employment rather than adopt a totally passive state. The case made at that stage by some hon. Members was that the present availability rules were sufficient to achieve that common goal and that the use of the phrase "actively seeking work" was unnecessary. I believe that the case is proved in the opposite direction.

We know—my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) spelled this out—that more jobs are becoming available. But present legislation does not make it clear that unemployed claimants must go after those jobs. Some assert that it does, but I believe that the

commissioners' decisions add up to a substantive case that it does not. People are required to be available for work, and that will remain the situation under the 1975 Act.

The decision of the commissioner in R(U)5/80, which was often quoted in Committee, says that availability must be more than a simple passive state—a claimant must take some active step to draw attention to his availability. As I said in Committee, a series of decisions since then by the commissioners—authoritative decisions, although unreported—have made it clear that when someone declares that he is available for employment and backs that up by taking some simple step, such as attending a jobcentre, that is enough.

The case that arose in Committee was of a person who simply turned up at a jobcentre, did not leave any name, address or contact and was judged to have done enough under the existing arrangements. A claimant today would not have to do more than that; he would not have to examine openings, look in the newspapers, inquire of friends or contact employers to satisfy the availability for work condition.

Ms. Short: I am sure that the Minister does not wish to misrepresent the position. The present position is that if a person's availability is called into question, he must prove that he is actively seeking work and produce evidence to that effect.

Mr. Scott: It can be judged—even if a person has not taken those steps—that having been available, he can continue to be entitled to benefit. The commissioners have decided that. They have decided that those who have been available in the most passive way are entitled to continue to receive benefit. It is common ground, particularly when unemployment is falling rapidly and more jobs are being created, that we should be motivating, encouraging and persuading people to take advantage of the country's increased prosperity.

The clause is not a vehicle for harassing unemployed people. It is a way of encouraging them to get back into work. As I said in Committee, repeating what I said on Second Reading, only a tiny minority of the unemployed could be described as workshy or trying to work the system. As we know—as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said today and as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said more than once in Committee —there is a minority of that sort. But the rest of unemployed people, particularly in an improving unemployment situation, need encouragement to seek out the increasing number of vacancies that are becoming available. So I do not resile from the broad thrust of what we are trying to do in the clause.

I promised in Committee to look sympathetically at the question of holidays. I have now agreed with the Secretary of State for Employment that in regulations we shall have power to deem that for up to two weeks in any 12-month period a holiday can be taken, and people will be deemed to be actively seeking work during those two weeks. I hope that that will be accepted as a sensible solution to that issue.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) again returned to the point she raised in Committee about people attending funerals and not being able to satisfy the condition of actively seeking work during the day or two they were away. As we have changed the test from being a daily test of availability to a weekly test of actively seeking work, there is no reason why somebody should not attend—as it might be in the hon. Lady's case, across the water—for a few days, and for the rest of the week be able to take sufficient steps to show that he or she was actively seeking work.

The hon. Lady also raised the question of studying, and my remarks on that will, in a sense, have an impact on my comments about volunteering. I accept that if someone is taking a course of study, that person is, simply by doing that, helping to improve his or her eventual possibility of getting back into employment. That should be taken into account, but I do not believe that simply because a person is engaged in part-time study, he or she should be exempt from any requirement to take steps actively to seek work. The fact that a person is studying should be part of the pattern that is taken into account when a judgment is made about the totality of the effort that is being made to get back into employment.

In Committee we discussed the sort of steps we would expect people to take to show that they were actively seeking work—following up advertisements in newspapers and visiting employers and so on. The steps that they would take would, of course, vary according to the type of employment that they were seeking.

There are some types of employment where turning up on the site and offering one's services would be appropriate. There are others where a properly prepared CV, sent to a number of employers, would be more appropriate to show that one was actively seeking work. Our intention is that the system should respond in a flexible and sympathetic way to the differing needs of people in showing whether they are seeking work.

In essence—this will sound familiar to those who were members of the Committee—there is a contract between the state and unemployed people. As a Government, we should be trying to run the economy in such a way that more jobs are created. If people are unemployed through no fault of their own, they should, for the relevant period, be entitled to unemployment benefit.

There should be a state service providing advice about vacancies and guidance to people on how they can get back into work. But the other side of that contract—which is that people should be prepared to take active steps to find their way back into employment—should not be ignored. That is the essence of the contract, and in my view it is sensible and proper.

I am keen on people using their time to study, and I am also keen that individuals should make good use of their time when they are unemployed, and there can be few things more beneficial than caring or otherwise using one's time in a voluntary capacity. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), I have had close contact in the past with Community Service Volunteers and I know that the work done by volunteers is immensely valuable to society in general. Those in voluntary work are improving their prospects of gaining employment in the longer run, and that is what clause 7 is all about.

I hope that I can persuade the House that the amendments, which are well intentioned and with which I have sympathy, are not necessary, as we already intend to make special provision for the treatment of voluntary work. The hon. Member for Caernarfon recognised that there are technical defects in both amendments. I shall not rest my case simply on the technical defects. I am anxious to persuade my hon. Friends and other hon. Members who put their names to the amendments that I recognise that

[Mr. Scott]

some charitable organisations depend heavily on the use of unemployed people as volunteers. The work that they do is commendable, important and of benefit to the individuals as well as to society, but I do not believe that the fact that they are doing voluntary work should mean that they should be exempted from the need to take steps actively to get themselves back into paid employment. That would be wrong.

6.30 pm

Mr. Rowe: I want to be absolutely clear. If someone wishes to start a career in residential work, looking after the elderly, and if he is told that he should work first for six months as a volunteer, is my hon. Friend saying that that would still not be regarded as seeking work?

Mr. Scott: I cannot accept that the purpose of unemployment benefit is to provide for and sustain such activity. The purpose of unemployment benefit is to insulate people who are unemployed through no fault of their own. I will provide in regulations that when a decision is taken about whether someone is actively seeking work, the fact that the person is engaged in voluntary work should be one factor to be weighed in the balance. But, just as anyone doing voluntary work at present has to be available for work to qualify for unemployment benefit, that person will have to take steps —in most cases fewer steps than someone not doing voluntary work—to show that he has been actively seeking work.

I do not believe that it would be impossible for people to take additional steps, such as writing letters in the evening, telephoning employers and so on, to satisfy the system that they are still actively seeking work while carrying out voluntary activities. I shall make sure that that is provided for in regulations so that the adjudicating authorities can take proper account of it. That is the right balance. The very fact that it will be accounted for specifically in regulations means that it will be impossible for adjudicating officers not to take account of it. In those circumstances I hope that those who put their names to the amendments will agree not to press them. As I have said, they are in any case, technically not accurate. If they are pressed, I shall have to ask the House to reject them.

As was clear in Committee, there is a fundamental division between the two sides of the House on clause 7. I do not think that further argument will resolve that division. I suspect that the only way to resolve it will be in the Lobby.

Mrs. Beckett: It has been an interesting debate. We remain of the view that the clause is as unnecessary as it is harsh. The issues raised on the various amendments about, for example, the impact of the clause on the possibility of study or voluntary work, show how harsh it might be. I welcome the fact that the Minister and the Secretary of State for Employment have agreed that if a person takes two weeks' holiday he can be deemed to be actively seeking work in that period, but it shows paradoxically how tight the provision is when that has to be accounted for specifically in the legislation.

We have concentrated primarily on the provisions of the law rather than on its administration. In a sense the Minister sought to justify the law by saying that its administration can be flexible and sympathetic. That is possible. Equally it is possible that the reverse will be the case. The law itself is draconian. The clause will place enormous discretion in the hands of fairly junior officers who may use the denial of the right to benefit to penalise people who come before them if they judge differently from the Minister, in general terms, the value or the justice of people being able to study or to do voluntary work while unemployed.

What the Minister said to his hon. Friends about the value of voluntary work was revealing. It is generally recognised in the House and outside that people who have no choice about joblessness have tried to turn that joblessness to good use by taking such opportunities as arise to study, to do voluntary work and so on, in the hope usually of improving their capacity later to find work. The message from the Minister to his hon. Friends about their amendment on voluntary work is in effect that that permission, as it were, is being withdrawn. The Minister said that he will cover that position in regulations, but the thrust of what the Government are saying is that the recognition of the powerlessness of many jobless people is being withdrawn and that they should spend their time, however fruitlessly, with however little point and to whatever effect, just looking for work. That is why we wish to delete clause 7.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 187, Noes 306.

Division No. 177] **[6.36 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint

Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony

Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 9

DISQUALIFICATION FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT

Mrs. Beckett: I beg to move amendment No. 116, in page 6, line 10, leave out '(c) and (d)' and insert 'and (c)'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 110, in page 6, line 18, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3A) For subsection (4) of that section "meaning of suitable employment" there shall be substituted—

"(4) For the purposes of subsection (1) above, regulations shall

(a) prescribe matters which are to be taken into account or determining whether a person does have good cause for any act or omission;"'

No. 2, in page 6, line 31, at end insert

'other than—

(a) whether the level of remuneration is reasonable for that employment, or

(b) any excuse that the person would be likely to incur in connection with that employment.'.

No. 3, in page 6, line 38, after 'which', insert

'is unsuited to his skills or experience or'.

Government amendment No. 99.

No. 111, in page 7, line 40, at end add—

'(7) Nothing in sections 7, 8 and 9 shall prevent the adjudication officer when reaching any decision under sections 7, 8 and 9 taking into account patterns of employment associated with particular professions.'.

Mrs. Beckett: The amendments relate to clause 9 which, as indicated in the debate on amendment No. 5, is of a piece with other aspects of the Government's approach to wages and the nature of the job search required by clause 7. The effect of clause 9 as it stands will be to require people to apply for or take jobs or training places without regard to the suitability of those jobs or training places to their skills and experience, and without regard in particular—again, this is written on the face of the Bill—to the wages offered or to the conditions of work. Rejecting or failing actively to search for any work, at any wages and in any conditions, may lead to benefit being suspended—probably, as seems to be the norm these days, for the full period of six months, as there is no evidence of discretion available to adjudication officers in that respect.

No Government have offered such a carte blanche to the greedy, irresponsible or exploitative employer since unemployment insurance was invented in 1911, and with it the idea that a job offer could be rejected without incurring disqualification from benefit if there was good cause and the offer was not of suitable work. It is important to emphasise that, under the law, after a period of unemployment people might be called on to widen their horizons beyond the direct field of their previous job, but they could not be disqualified for rejecting or refusing to pursue a job if the wages and conditions on offer were not reasonably fair once the scope of search had been widened.

Through this clause, as through other measures such as the removal of wages councils, the Government seem to be trying to erase the idea that there is any such thing as a proper job or a living wage. In pursuit of that objective, people may be pressured by the threat of disqualification and suspension of benefit to take steps that they may believe—and may be correct to believe—are damaging to their long-term prospects of re-employment. Someone with a skilled job or a supervisory or managerial post might be pressed to take a job as a janitor or clerical assistant because that was all that was readily available.

Ministers claim that that will not happen, but that is not what the law says. What Conservative Back Benchers say is more interesting and truthful. They say, "Why not?" They want to know what is wrong with being a janitor or clerical assistant and why people should not be pushed into any job because any job is better than being on the dole. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to hear Conservative Members justifying my observations.

It is far from clear whether employers are as open-minded as Conservative Members. The Opposition regret that an employer receiving an application for a supervisory or managerial post from a former manager or supervisor now labouring on the shop floor may not get further down the application form than "present occupation" before throwing it in the bin and saying, "He must be joking." One of our prime complaints about the Bill is that the only way in which it seeks to affect the job market is by punishing the unemployed. It has nothing to offer on other obstacles to possible re-employment, such as the attitudes of employers.

Amendment No. 116 deals with the question of retaining the word "suitable" in section 20(1)(d) of the Social Security Act 1975. That subsection would otherwise be able to disqualify someone who has without good cause refused to carry out any recommendations given with a view to assisting him to find employment. When we are not even talking about a job which is necessarily available to that individual, but merely about the advice that he might be given to look for a job, it is right to retain the concept of people looking for "suitable" employment. Certainly it would be wrong to disqualify a person for failing to carry out a recommendation.

Amendment No. 2 is directed specifically at the level of pay and would write into the Bill two exceptions to the general ban on taking into account at any stage the level of remuneration—whether the rate of pay is reasonable for the job and also work expenses. It is plainly absurd to suggest that no account should be taken of the rate of pay. Someone is entitled to expect a reasonable rate of pay for the job on offer, whatever the job or however long the period of unemployment that the person has suffered. The Government's view on this is not altogether clear. In Committee the Minister agreed that

"Someone who turns down a job offered to him privately at a derisory wage should not be disqualified from unemployment benefit."

The Minister seemed to fear that someone in a private agency might tip off the Department of Social Security that a person had turned down a job which it was wholly unreasonable, even in the Government's view, for him to accept and he might then be disqualified from benefit. The Minister said:

"I want to find a way through regulations preventing that from happening, but cannot say exactly how it is possible to do it, nor what the impact might be on other sources through which the job might be advertised."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 14 February 1989; c. 487-533.]

We pressed the Minister on that and asked what would happen if a job was advertised not just through a private agency—we agree that the Government should act in that case—but by a private agency and at the jobcentre, whether or not the person knew that the job was on offer at the jobcentre. What would happen if the person turned the job down because the wages were derisory? Will that be allowed if the job is offered privately, but not if it is offered at the same wages through the jobcentre? We asked the Minister that question in Committee, but there is no record of a reply, let alone one that makes any sense. The only way in which the Minister's proposal would make any kind of sense would be if it were extended to jobs offered through the jobcentre as well as through private agencies. That is the first leg of amendment No. 2.

The second part of amendment No. 2 would allow work expenses explicitly to be taken into account when deciding whether a person had good cause to refuse a job. Again, we discussed that at length in Committee. Although we challenged the Minister about work expenses such as travel and child care costs, and asked whether they would count as good cause for refusing a job on low wages, the Minister seemed to say that he thought that they "ought to" as opposed to "would." Because the provision in the Bill explicitly states that all questions of remuneration are ruled out, that might be taken to override the Minister's comments about what it might be nice to take into account in the way of work expenses. At one point the Minister said:

"There is no straightforward answer"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F;* 9 February 1989, c. 408.]

about the kind of work expenses that might be taken into account.

Ms. Short: My hon. Friend will recall that there is provision in the Bill for the Government to make regulations allowing them to set minimum pay levels. If the pay for a job was below that, it would be reasonable to turn it down. The Minister explicitly refused to promise to make such regulations, so despite the undertaking to which my hon. Friend refers, unless the Minister changes his mind today he is explicitly ruling out making any regulations to provide for a minimum level of pay.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. She will recall that in Committee some examples were given of levels of pay that we thought most people would consider wholly inadequate. The main reaction to them was to challenge whether jobs with such levels of pay were on offer, not to say that if they were on offer they should not be accepted.

7 pm

Our other reason for raising the issue of work expenses is that, although the Minister discussed the question of travel expenses, he later confirmed that it was travelling time rather than cost that would constitute good cause for refusal. The physical difficulty of a person's taking on a job, rather than his or her travel expenses making the wages wholly unrealistic, would be considered a good cause. Later, however, the Minister once again seemed to suggest that expenses or costs might be taken into account. When my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) pressed the Minister about whether gross or net pay would be considered, the Minister said that he imagined that account would be taken of the take-home pay of the person involved.

One reason why we are determined to make the effort to write into the Bill some specific reference to work expenses, and why we are reluctant to accept that in practice sensible guidelines will be adopted, is the fact that social fund officers are explicitly prevented by the Department's guidelines even from offering loans towards work expenses, and even where the absence of such money means that the job will be lost. That is why amendment No. 2 should commend itself to the House.

Amendment No. 3 prevents people from being forced, under threat of disqualification, to take jobs unsuited to their skills or experience. In Committee, the Minister's remarks showed that he thought that the concept of a suitable job ought to be taken into account, even though he was taking it out of the legislation. Some reference of that kind should be written into the legislation so that in considering good cause, quite apart from the rate of pay, the authorities will have to take suitability into account.

As the Bill stands, the Secretary of State will be able to lay down in regulations what is or is not good cause. Those regulations could remove many of the established safeguards in case law on issues such as suitability. If the Government had intended good cause to cover everything except the level of pay, now covered by suitability, there would be no reason not to retain both concepts in the Bill. Therefore, if the Government intend the adjudicating authorities to take into account some concept of suitability, that should be encouraged by some reference in the Bill. That is the purpose of amendment No. 3.

[Mrs. Beckett]

This group of amendments should commend itself to the House. My hon. Friends and I, however, direct our attention particularly to amendment No. 2.

Mr. Kirkwood: I should like to speak to amendments Nos. 110 and 111 that appear in my name, and, mercifully, I can do so briefly. I had in mind two ideas when tabling these amendments. First, I wanted to increase the measure of flexibility available to adjudicating officers and their like when they consider some of the questions contained in clause 9; to acknowledge the difficulty that people with disabilities have in acquiring employment; and to prevent them from being doubly penalised.

Secondly, amendment No. 111 seeks to take account of the needs of professions such as acting. I fully recognise and understand that there was an extensive debate on that in Committee. However, it is right to take a few moments to look again at the difficulties facing those who pursue professions and jobs that are seasonable, may be stop-go and may not fit well into the pattern set out by the Department.

The House will know, and those who were on the Committee will remember that much play was made of the fact, that actors work on a casual basis with short-term contracts and might be required to work for one day at a time. In between those days of work, there may be long gaps which make for an erratic employment pattern. That makes it difficult for them to qualify under the various regulations stipulated by the Bill. The provisions in clause 8 require a claimant to work 13 weeks within a 26-week period in order to requalify for unemployment benefit. That would be a difficult requirement for actors to meet.

Clause 9 says that anyone on the register for three months or more must be prepared to accept any work at any rate. If that policy were ruthlessly pursued, it would have the potential to drive actors out of their profession. I know that Ministers said that they would make some concessions and seemed to be listening to our case in Committee. However, as I understand it, their concessions were in terms of the regulations that were to flow from the primary legislation.

The House would be right to reconsider the opportunity that these clauses provide to make it clear on the face of the Bill—in the primary legislation—that there should be flexibility to protect these two particular categories of unemployment benefit claimants. In addition, the clause as it stands could trap many qualified people, particularly those with disabilities, who may have problems getting a job. Despite their high qualifications, such people may have to accept low-paid and unqualified manual work. In turn, that will prevent those without qualifications from obtaining the lower quality work. That problem may arise if the clauses proceed unamended.

If the Government are setting their face against changing the general thrust of the legislation, we should seek to place on the face of the Bill a guaranteed degree of flexibility so that we do not have to rely on the Minister's statements that the legislation will be implemented with the customary milk of human kindness that we know to be in the forefront of every adjudication officer's mind. Generally, they serve the public well. Certainly, in my own constituency they do their job well and should not be criticised. However, they are under pressure, principally because the legislation that they are tied to implement is harsh and onerous. It is no fault of theirs that they have to apply it, and if they were given primary legislation that was more flexible at the edges, it would be easier to live with.

It is a mistake for the House to legislate on the basis of ideal people in ideal situations. The real world is not like that but contains many disadvantaged people in difficult and trying circumstances. A bit of discretion and flexibility, such as that contained in the amendments, would improve the legislation. The legislation should not be—as it seems to be—promulgated on the basis that everybody is to be treated as a scrounger. However, we accepted in earlier discussions on other clauses that only a minority of people are work shy. Framing the legislation on the basis of trying to catch them, and catching everybody else in the net as a result, is a silly way to proceed. I hope that the amendments will elicit some new and more progressive thinking and more flexibility from the Minister of State than we received in Committee.

Mr. Battle: Social security legislation is complex. Perhaps in recognition of that, the Department of Social Security has altered the logo—there is now a user-friendly smile—on its press handouts, but the legislation is still confusing.

During discussion of the previous clause, the Minister said that the Bill would not hit single parents with young children, which is manifestly untrue. They will be hit; if they are claiming unemployment benefit they will not be automatically entitled to it—they will have to go through the availability for work test——

Mr. Scott: Surely the hon. Gentleman will accept that people have a choice in this matter. If they are claiming unemployment benefit, they are, by definition, seeking to return to employment. If not, income support is the appropriate benefit for them. The lone parent has a clear choice.

Mr. Battle: The Minister tried to tell the House during discussion of the previous clause that people could not claim and said that single parents with children under 16 would not be affected—but they will be. I accept the point that he has just made, if he will accept that what I say is true in the context of the whole Bill.

Even Conservative Members who sat through the Committee proceedings for months have today repeated again that no one will be asked to accept any rate of pay. That, too, is palpably wrong. The Bill states that they will be asked to accept any rate. If they do not accept a job offered them at an incredibly low rate, they will be taken out of benefit. Conservative Members have repeated this afternoon. This may not be sinking in; many people outside the House do not believe it possible that the Government will force people to accept a job regardless of the pay offered for it.

This clause effectively prices people into work, and that should be plainly spelt out. If nothing else emerges from all the debates on the Bill this should: people must be aware before they sign on that, if they do not take the job they are offered at the price offered, they will not receive benefit.

The last time we debated this in Committee, the Minister challenged the idea that people are offered jobs at low rates. I seem to recall that he asked his civil servants to ring up jobcentres and check the examples that some of us gave of the jobs that were on offer there. I represent Leeds, which was a traditional manufacturing and textile area. The jobs have gone in the manufacturing sector and

been replaced, to some extent, by jobs in the service sector. During that restructuring, there has been a shift in the economy to a two-tier system in which some people—the majority—occupy relatively secure jobs but others have been priced into the temporary, part-time and low-paid sector.

I assure the Minister that I checked only yesterday with the Bramley jobcentre what jobs are on offer to the unemployed in my area. I shall focus on the low-paid jobs. The usual wages for jobs in the centre this week are £120 to £130 a week. That is well below the Council of Europe decency threshold, which the Government refuse to acknowledge, and well below the average wage in Britain, which now stands at £258 a week. Most of my constituents earn much less than the average wage. Perhaps the reason why the average wage is so high has something to do with the *Financial Times* report this week that directors and managers have had a 26 per cent. wage increase as a result of the tax cuts in last year's Budget. Perhaps they are pulling up the average wage. People at the bottom of the scale are certainly not earning high wages.

7.15 pm

In Bramley jobcentre, a semi-skilled lathe operator is offered £95 for a full week's work. A junior storekeeper will get £45 a week. A security guard—another job in the service sector—working 12-hour shifts and needing at least three months background in security before being able to apply gets £1.80 an hour. A presser, a job in what is left of the textile industry, is paid £2.1075 an hour, whatever that means. A machinist is offered £2.10 an hour.

A wages council deals with the wages in the clothing and textile industries and sets the minimum wage at £1.90. So these jobs are offered at 10p or 20p above the minimum. The Government propose to remove the wages council, thereby removing the minimum rate. Wage rates will then fall and people will discover that they are being offered even less.

In Committee, Conservative Members were sent a guide to the Bill by the Conservative party press department. It said that the purpose of the Bill was to

"ease the rigidities of the labour market".

The notes on clauses explain what that means:

"the level of remuneration will not be a just cause for turning down a job offer".

I hope that people are now sure what that means. It means that people will be forced to accept the lowest-paid jobs. The Government are deliberately manufacturing low pay by means of this Bill, and reinforcing the low-wage economy.

As for work expenses, a person in my constituency was referred to an employment agency, which advised him to go to the parts of the country in which there were jobs. He paid the bus fare to Harrogate, where he was referred to a construction site. At the site, he was told that there were no jobs, and the manager could not imagine why the employment agency had sent him along. He returned to the employment agency to ask where the advertisement had been seen, only to be told that the agency did not go by advertisements but sent people to areas where developments were taking place to see whether they could find a job. Conservative Members who vote against our amendment will be telling people like my constituent that, having paid the bus fare to go to Harrogate for a job, they will not get the money back. They will lose out because they have tried to find jobs and have been misled by employment agencies.

I hope that, at this late stage, the Government will tell people that this measure is designed to price them into work, and that they can be sent anywhere to find work, with no compensation or assistance. That will be profoundly unjust for the unemployed. It will not be easy for the Government to sell this measure with a smile and to pretend that it is part of a social security policy. It is part of a policy to price people into work. That is part of the Government's employment strategy and it has nothing to do with protecting people whose incomes are at the bottom of the scale.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I want briefly to support the amendments. There is already enough pressure on the unemployed to take jobs which are often unsuitable and badly paid.

Some of my constituents have brought their cases to my attention and, as is to be expected, I have taken them up with the local agencies. Inevitably, I have been informed of the regulations which the agencies are responsible for implementing locally. I know that some Conservative Members believe that the unemployed should take any job regardless of circumstances, conditions and pay. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) nodded in approval when that point was made earlier. We do not take that view. We work on the assumption that the overwhelming majority of the unemployed want to work. We do not accept for one moment the notion that they are workshy, or that they find any excuse not to take employment. In any country, a small number will behave like that, but they are wholly unrepresentative of most of the unemployed.

Being unemployed, if only Conservative Members and Ministers could understand it, does not just mean having nowhere near enough income. That is bad enough, and it is worse if a person has family responsibilities. There is a psychological factor as well.

Until very recently in the west midlands, there was a great deal of unemployment. In some parts of the region unemployment remains substantially high. But even in those circumstances, when a person could say that unemployment was not his fault and that others were in the same position, the unemployed did not feel like that. Instead, so many felt a sense of personal failure. They felt inadequate. Those in their 40s and 50s, with a lifetime of work behind them, felt that they had failed, and there was always the great worry about whether they would be able to work again. Those are all important and relevant factors when we are discussing legislation affecting those who are unfortunately without work.

I understand that, in Committee, the Minister said that someone who turned down a job that had been offered to him privately at a derisory wage would not be disqualified from unemployment benefit. A person therefore offered a job with inadequate wage outside the jobcentre would not be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit. The Minister may have changed his position. No doubt he will tell us the current position when he replies. However, if that remains the position—I shall be pleased if it does—is there not a contradiction between that and a person being offered a job at a derisory wage by a jobcentre? I hope that the Minister will answer those points.

Pay is certainly important. Why should a person who has been earning a reasonable sum of money accept any job at a derisory wage? A person may well take the view that he will not be able to earn as much as he did previously. He may well take the view that he will not be

[Mr. David Winnick]

able to work in precisely the same kind of occupation that he did previously. But that does not necessarily mean that he should take any type of job at a menial wage on which he cannot support his family. It is unthinkable that a person to whom a job is offered should not be able to take into consideration the pay that goes with it.

Ms. Short: There is another point. People seeking full-time employment may be forced to take part-time employment. The Government realised that, under the Bill, people could be forced to take fewer than 25 hours' work a week and thus not be entitled to family credit, so they said that they would change that. But anyone seeking full-time work can be forced into a job with as little as 25 hours' work a week at any rate of pay.

Mr. Winnick: I agree: my hon. Friend makes a valid point. I do not know whether Conservative Members are worried about this, but the nub of our argument is that it is wrong and inappropriate in every possible way that pay should not be a factor when a person decides whether to take a particular job. Our amendment will inevitably be defeated—the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) nods in agreement—and that will mean that the unemployed will be in the position that we have been describing. They will not be able to take into consideration pay that is inadequate and on which they cannot support their family.

That is wrong. No Conservative Member would want to be in that position, so why should other members of the community? Conservative Members would not like to be unemployed and be told that they must take a job however low the pay is, so why should our constituents be penalised in that fashion?

Mr. Wigley: I may not have followed fully what the hon. Gentleman said, but may people be forced into jobs with low hours and low wages, and so be below the threshold for national insurance payments, thus being in danger of missing out there as well?

Mr. Winnick: That may well be so.

Just to widen the debate a little—if I am out of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will correct me—I am opposed to changing Sunday trading hours not just on religious grounds—we respect those with a religious point of view on that issue—but because people may be forced to work on a Sunday for low pay. I am all the more determined to oppose any change in the Sunday trading law after this legislation. However, I shall not pursue that point.

The Bill is a direct incentive to employers to pay disgracefully low wages. It helps those employers who could not care less about paying their employees adequately. Employers will in many cases take the view that the unemployed can be forced to take jobs with wages on which no one could support a family. This legislation is a direct incentive for the worst kind of employer. *[Interruption.]* I do not know what the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is muttering, but whatever it is I doubt whether it was sympathetic to my point.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that a person who, in the circumstances that he describes, takes a relatively low-paid or part-time job would have his family income made up with family credit. These days, people earning in excess of £9,000 a year qualify for that extra benefit.

Mr. Winnick: That is all very patronising. First, if such people had no young dependants, that would not apply. Secondly, the hon. Lady is saying that those employers who pay disgracefully low wages should be subsidised by the rest of the community. That shows what modern day Toryism has come to.

The amendments would help to modify a bad Bill. They would give the unemployed some sort of protection. The amendments are justified and though they will be defeated we shall carry on the argument in the country.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): My constituency and the Sunderland area are concentrated microcosms of the reality that my hon. Friends the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) have been describing.

For some time the Government have been pursuing the dual strategy of trying to make the real unemployment that exists in our society disappear from the statistics and neatly aiding the most unscrupulous employers. Those two objectives fit together like a hand in a glove and the clause will make matters even worse.

Since December, Sunderland shipyards have been running down as a result of the Government's disgraceful and vindictive decision to close them, and 2,000 workers have been made redundant. The Government pretend that the situation is not as bad as it seems. There has been much propaganda claiming that one third of North East Shipbuilders' employees have already found other jobs. That is not true, but even if it were, it is extraordinary that the Government should think that it is all right for two thirds to remain unemployed.

When we examine the claim that one third of those workers have been re-employed, we learn a great deal about why we need the amendments that we are debating. Three welders were sent by the jobcentre to Hull, over 100 miles from Sunderland, to do some welding work on a refrigerated cargo ship which had been sitting in the dock for weeks on end. When they arrived on the job they discovered that the hold had not been cleaned and that it was coated with rotting fish. Those welders were just told, "Clean it yourselves and get on with the job." And they did that for a derisory wage. After three days, they had finished the job and were back on the dole, but I guarantee that when the Sunderland jobcentre issues figures showing how many NES people have been re-employed since being made redundant, they will be included. I suspect, indeed, that if they are sent to another rotten job for a couple of days next week they will be counted yet again—the same people.

7.30 pm

Then we have the sort of situation that I mentioned in a previous debate, and on which I want to dwell a little tonight. An unscrupulous ship repair employer on Teesside sends a bus to Sunderland, more than 30 miles away. Forty men are sent by the jobcentre to stand in the road at 5 o'clock in the morning, waiting to go to temporary employment in the ship repair yard on Teesside. The princely sum of £127 per week is offered to highly skilled workers. No travelling expenses or meal allowances are provided. When the bus pulls up, the foreman gets off and says, "I want five burners this

morning. The rest of you can go home." That happens day in and day out. If someone says, "I am not prepared to go and stand there, like an animal in the market, at 5 o'clock in the morning, to be insulted like that," his benefit is stopped because he is deemed to be unavailable for work. That is the reality of Thatcher's Britain.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): That is precisely the sort of situation that existed in the docks in the days before the dock labour scheme. The tally man would come along and chuck in the buttons, and the men would all fight to see who would get the jobs. The purpose of the proposal to scrap the dock labour scheme is precisely to get back to that situation.

Mr. Clay: I would love to develop that point, but I suspect that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would not allow me to do so.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, I would not.

Mr. Clay: In passing, however, I can assure my hon. Friend that shipyard workers in Sunderland understand very well the opposition to the abolition to the dock labour scheme.

Let me return to the question of availability for work and of unscrupulous employers. People who are, as it were, successfully employed, even on a temporary basis, are suddenly told that there is to be a four-hour overtime shift, five days a week. It is not compulsory, but the bus does not leave until after the overtime period. By the way, no premium rate is paid—it is flat rate. That is the type of employer involved. Of course, those men who are not fortunate enough to have their own cars know that it would take longer to get home by public transport than it would if they actually worked the overtime—the non-compulsory four-hour shift—and took the workers' bus. Tricks of that sort are being played by employers, who know that they have this legislation behind them and that people are in terror of having their benefit stopped.

It is absurd for the Government to claim that, effectively, people are pricing themselves out of work. A skilled shipyard worker who asks for £167 a week – that was the skilled rate in British shipbuilding last year, before there was any pay rise—is not pricing himself out of a job. It is quite disgraceful that skilled people are having their benefit stopped because they are asking for that rate of pay.

I want to draw attention to the other side of the coin in respect of these employers whom the Government are aiding. The employer that I mentioned—and there are many more like him—apart from the temporary work for three or four days a week, and even permanent low-paid employment for a handful of people, has some very short-term and temporary requirements. Four weeks ago, representatives of that employer were in the last remaining working part of the Sunderland shipyard – in the outfitting facility at North Sands—on a Friday afternoon. They were trespassing. Without management permission, they were circulating among the handful of workers still there waiting to be made redundant. They were saying, "We have a quick job on, over the weekend, down in Teesside. For anyone who wants to come, there is £100 in your hand. No questions asked. Work right through the weekend. You might actually have to work overnight, 24 hours round the clock, but there is £100 in your hand. Bring the gear with you." That is incitement to theft of British Shipbuilders' equipment, and blatant fraud in the sense of breach of tax and national insurance laws. This is the employer who is also indulging in the practices that I described earlier. Life will be so much better for him if the amendments that we are discussing are defeated. He will be able to abuse the system even more.

I want to end on a point that I think is relevant to our discussion. More than a year ago I reported an employer for inducing people to work while claiming benefit. I was told by the Department of Employment that there was not enough evidence. Obviously, the employees involved were reluctant to be prosecuted. I asked if they could be given an amnesty, in which case they would give names and addresses and testify. For some reason an amnesty was not available. However, the employees gave the evidence anyway, and the Department of Employment had it for more than a year. Indeed, the regional fraud squad and the Department of Social Security were also in possession of it. After endless correspondence with the Department, I received last week a letter saying that that employer would not be prosecuted.

A few weeks ago I tabled a parliamentary question asking how many employers had been prosecuted for breach of the social security regulations. According to the answer, in the last two years two people in the whole of Britain—one in Kent and one in Wales—have been prosecuted. A Government who can produce this Bill and reject amendments that would inject a scintilla of dignity into the process and give employees and the unemployed some fairly marginal protection in respect of their benefits, are quite happy to allow the unscrupulous, cowboy, criminal employers of Britain, who are defrauding the tax and social security systems, free licence.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does not anyone on the Conservative benches wish to speak?

Mr. Winnick: Will no one defend the Government?

Mr. Scott: I apologise for the delay—I was expecting the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to contribute to the debate.

I wish to explain briefly why it is impossible for me to commend these amendments to the House. I shall then refer to Government amendment No. 99. I do not think that there will be much surprise at our rejection of amendments Nos. 2 and 3. Indeed, the Opposition clearly expected me to advise the House to reject the amendments and that that would be the outcome of the Division. The first part of amendment No. 2 is an attempt to maintain the status quo and the concept of suitable employment. We had considerable discussion about this when the Bill was in Committee. In essence, the current situation is that the unemployed person may not be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit if he turns down, or fails to follow up, an opportunity for employment that is not suitable. At present, the consideration of suitability includes consideration of the concept of what I might term the going rate of pay. If the job is not suitable, even in that respect, it can be turned down without incurring disqualification for benefit.

One very undesirable effect of that provision is that it takes no account of the individual's ability to command a particular wage. We should consider whether it is right to ask an employer to pay exactly the same rate—the going rate—to a person who has recently moved from one job to another, and whose skills are still at a high level, and to a

[Mr. Scott]

person who may have been out of work for a considerable time and require an element, or even a considerable amount, of retraining to get back to the level of skill of the rest of the employees. I believe that the employer should have the right to take into account the ability, skills and experience of potential recruits in deciding what pay to offer. The concept of the going rate is outmoded, but I understand why the Opposition cling to it.

Nevertheless, we understand that when people are seeking work in the immediate aftermath of unemployment, a period ought to be allowed during which they can look for work in the field in which they worked before and at a level of pay similar to that which they previously enjoyed. That is why the Bill allows for a permitted period. When an unemployed person first visits the unemployment office, the new claimant adviser will give an indication of the length of the permitted period—a maximum of 13 weeks is allowed. The claimant will know that for the term of that permitted period he will be at risk of being disqualified only if he turns down jobs in the same field as his previous employment and offering the level of remuneration that he previously enjoyed.

In the course of such interviews staff will of course be anxious to obtain as much detailed information as they can about the experience, skills and qualifications, as well as the personal circumstances, of the individual concerned. That will enable the employment service to identify appropriate vacancies and to discuss them with the individual. If a person refuses even to be interviewed for a job offered during the permitted period, or fails to turn up, his benefit is likely to be at risk. However, such decisions are taken by adjudication officers, who will have to judge and weigh the merits of individual cases.

In offering a job to any person, the employment service will act in good faith and will establish as far as possible that the job is within the skills and capabilities of the individual concerned. The service will try to offer a vacancy with conditions generally within the range of what is representative of the local labour market in the occupation concerned. However, the service will not necessarily restrict itself only to vacancies advised by employers but will use its own wit and wisdom, and its knowledge of the local labour market, in canvassing other vacancies. Employment service staff will also be at pains to ensure that those seeking employment are advised about any in-work benefits that may be available. Those will depend on the individual's personal circumstances. The leaflet, "How To Be Better Off At Work" will be topped up by specific, detailed personal assessments of the in-work benefits and income available.

The second part of amendment No. 2 seeks to incorporate in primary legislation a requirement that, in considering whether a person has good cause for rejecting a particular vacancy, adjudication officers should take work-related expenses into account. I cannot accept the amendment as drafted, but I believe that certain work-related expenses ought to be taken into account and, as I said in Committee, proper regard will be paid to that point. It is not a straightforward matter and requires careful consideration, but I give the House an undertaking that we shall introduce regulations which will be a more appropriate vehicle, taking account of that aspect.

I do not intend to include child care costs. I know that there is a debate about that. Some people hold the view that child care costs should be included in the calculation, and I understand those feelings. However, lone parents, for whom such costs are likely to be the greatest burden, are not required to be available for work to qualify for income support. Others having high child care costs are probably second earners, and they are in a different category. I suspect that that argument will continue as we consider ways of encouraging people back into employment. The employment situation is growing tighter and tighter. That argument will not go away, but I am unable to accept it, and a provision for child care costs will not be included in the regulations that will be introduced in due course.

7.45 pm

Amendment No. 3 attempts to introduce in primary legislation the concept that a person cannot be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit if he refuses to seek or accept employment that is

"unsuited to his skills or experience."

Clause 9 already acknowledges that skills and experience are important, which is why we provide the permitted period, but it would not be right to include a longer-term provision in the legislation. Once a person has exhausted his permitted period, he ought to be expected to widen the scope of his job search activities and to contemplate employment outside those areas for which his skills and experience are best fitted.

In Committee, there was general agreement that the longer a person is unemployed, the more difficult that person finds it to get back into work. The very fact that a person has been unemployed leads some employers to regard him as being less employable, if not unemployable. Even if a person finds employment in a field that is not his usual one, his chances of reverting to his usual trade and making full use of his experience and skills is improved.

It would be a retrograde step to accept amendment No. 3, which would enable and encourage the unemployed unduly to restrict for a prolonged period the work that they are prepared to consider. That is not consistent with our desire to ensure that people are encouraged to make sensible use of all avenues in pursuing all the opportunities that become available. The employment service will, of course, take account of a person's skills and experience and attempt to find him an appropriate job. Where that cannot be done, it is right to take a wider approach.

Amendments Nos. 110 and 111 in the name of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) are both wide-ranging. Amendment No. 110 places an obligation on the Secretary of State to make regulations for prescribing matters and circumstances which should be taken into account by the adjudication authorities in determining whether a person has good cause for turning down or failing to follow up an employment opportunity. I am not unsympathetic to setting out in regulations rather than in primary legislation as much guidance for adjudication authorities as possible. They must have a certain amount of discrimination—that is inherent in their work as an independent authority—but the more guidance we can give them in arriving at such decisions the better.

We shall use the powers in the Bill, but we do not intend to produce an exhaustive list of considerations because we want adjudication offices to be left with some power to take account of matters and circumstances that they

consider relevant in particular individual circumstances. The considerations that we shall specify by regulation will include whether the employment in question is likely to subject the claimant to unreasonable physical or mental stress, which will allow account to be taken of the individual's physical and mental capacity; whether it would conflict with a sincerely held religious or conscientious objection; whether the claimant's domestic responsibilities would make it physically difficult for him to undertake the employment; and whether the travelling time involved in reaching the place of employment would be excessive. As I indicated in Committee, we intend providing for travelling of less than one hour in each direction, unless even that is unreasonable due to a health factor. Also considered will be whether the expenses necessary to undertake the employment, excluding child care expenses, would absorb an unduly high proportion of earnings. Those are the kind of considerations that we hope to cover in regulations, and I trust that they will give a steer to adjudication authorities that will prove helpful overall.

Amendment No. 111 seeks to provide that regulations will take into account.

"patterns of employment associated with particular professions."

I thought that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West would intervene on that point, but I know that he has been in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security. In essence, I am reluctant to move to a situation in which particular professions are plucked out and entirely different arrangements made for them. I know that my hon. Friend is anxious to be as helpful as possible to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West and to the representatives of Equity who recently met him.

Mr. Tony Banks: I did not intervene earlier because I did not wish so to inflame the Minister as to set at naught the progress that we have made so far. I am obliged to the Minister for what he has done so far, but the case presented by British Actors Equity clearly reveals acting as a profession, and actors as a body of workers who are particularly affected. I believe that the Government ought to make an exception for them.

Mr. Scott: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point of view. I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is anxious to be as helpful as he possibly can. Amendment No. 111, another wide-ranging amendment, attempts to empower the adjudication officer to override any provision or alteration made in clause 7, 8 or 9 by enabling him to take into account any pattern of employment associated with particular professions. That was the main point raised by Actors Equity.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am sure that the Minister has the interests of the profession at heart, but it would be helpful if he could sketch some of the progress, if any, made in negotiations between the Under-Secretary of State and the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Scott: It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman would have a word with my hon. Friend at the end of the debate as he has had meetings with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West and with representatives of Actors Equity.

Government amendment No. 99 in no way alters the policy on permitted periods. It states more clearly on the face of the Bill precisely what the intentions are. A decision on a person's permitted period will be made by adjudication officers. Such a decision could be relevant only when a person has turned down a job and faces the possibility of disqualification under section 20. We thought it right to clarify the situation in primary legislation.

The amendment seeks to provide that adjudication will not be necessary at the beginning of every claim. Informal advice will be given to a claimant about what his permitted period is likely to be. If a doubt then arises, the adjudication officer will make a formal decision on the permitted period, but it would never be shorter than the period of which the claimant was advised in the beginning and in certain circumstances it might turn out to be longer. Individuals will know for how long they can safely hold out in an attempt to get jobs in their usual occupations by resting on the advice of the employment service as given at the beginning. That is a helpful amendment which clarifies the Government's intention. I ask the House to accept it and to reject the other amendments.

Mrs. Beckett: I take the Minister's point on amendment 99 about the preference for giving informal advice about the permitted period. I am glad to hear him reiterate what he wrote in a letter to me—that the adjudication officer's ruling would never be for a shorter period than initially advised. As that is not stated in the proposed amendment, I presume that the Minister is indicating that it will be included in the regulations. He nods, so I am pleased to have that confirmation.

Perhaps the Minister might wish to consider later that it might be useful for the individual to have the right to ask for a formal decision by the adjudicating officer on the length of the period of disqualification; he should not be left in limbo, particularly if he is not happy with the initial advice given on the length of the permitted period. He should have the right to go to the adjudicating officer at any stage to ask for a formal ruling on the permitted period. He would then know where he stood, and would not possibly risk disqualification if he thought that the original ruling was so unreasonable that no one could really have meant it.

We believe that three months should be the minimum length of the permitted period rather than the maximum length, because in many cases it seems to be too short a time.

We are trying to find ways of improving clause 9, particularly as it removes all considerations not only of the way the skill or experience of people should be taken into account in deciding whether a job offer is suitable, but especially of levels of pay.

The Minister adopted the sort of sympathetic manner that he no doubt hopes the adjudication officers will adopt with claimants. No doubt anyone listening only to the Minister would think that the Government were putting a reasonable case. Fortunately we have also heard hon. Members such as my hon. Friends the Members for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), and for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). They spoke of the harsh and dark reality of the wage levels and conditions of work that people are now under pressure to accept in the present labour market. Particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North identified the

[Mrs. Beckett]

terrible pressure brought to bear now on unemployed people and how that pressure is likely to be exacerbated out of all recognition by the Bill.

The Minister said that people should be expected, after a period of unemployment, to widen their job scope. As with clause 7, Labour Members recognise that people should be, and under current legislation are, expected to widen the scope of their job search. The Minister said that he realises that a period of unemployment leads some employers to regard people as less employable, but nothing is being done in the Bill about that attitude. Only the unemployed are having their behaviour modified, not those who might be able to offer people work.

I believe that the case put by my hon. Friends reflects more accurately the reality of the labour market and also the terrible condition into which we believe it is likely to sink if this legislation is passed. I intend to advise my hon. Friends to press amendment No. 2 and, in those circumstances, to withdraw amendment 116.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 2, in page 6, line 31, at end insert

'other than—

(a) whether the level of remuneration is reasonable for that employment, or

(b) any expense that the person would be likely to incur in connection with that employment.'.—*[Mrs. Beckett.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 170, Noes 280.

Division No. 178] **[7.57 pm**

AYES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon John

Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: No. 99, in page 7, line 9, leave out from 'means' to end of line 13 and insert

'in relation to any person, such period, whether expired or not, as may be determined in accordance with regulations by an adjudication officer on the submission of the question whether that person is disqualified under section 20 above for receiving unemployment benefit; and any such regulations may prescribe—

(a) the day on which any such period shall be regarded as having commenced in any case;'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Mrs. Beckett: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 7, line 40, at end insert—

'(7) In section 97(1C) of the principal Act, at the end there shall be added the words "and, in particular, on the determination of the period for which a person is to be disqualified, under section 20(1) above for receiving unemployment benefit".'.

I shall move the amendment with extreme brevity, in view of the constraints on time.

In Committee, we discussed the unfettered discretion that adjudication officers have to impose a period of disqualification which can range from one week to 26 weeks. We pointed out to the Minister that there is substantial evidence that adjudication offices automatically imposed the maximum period of disqualification when it was six weeks, continued to do so when it was 13 weeks and still impose it automatically now that it is 26 weeks. Although there must be some, I have never come across a case in which anyone was disqualified from the benefit for less than 26 weeks. Before the Minister says that those are the people who write to Members of Parliament, the same decision continues to apply to people who have been told that their disqualification is being called in question and have not received a formal decision as to the period of disqualification. But invariably the formal disqualification is for the full 26 weeks.

The Minister said that advice might be given by the chief adjudication officer or that commissioners' decisions should provide guidance on what consideration should be

[Mrs. Beckett]

given to the period of disqualification. However, the commissioners have said that, because of the way in which the legislation is drafted, they can give no real guidance, and the chief adjudication officer in his annual report complained about his inability to offer guidance. Therefore, it is clear that no guidance will be offered, although the chief adjudication officer has said how difficult it is for adjudication officers to exercise that discretion.

The amendment seeks to give the chief adjudication officer the power he wants to give more detailed advice on the subject. I commend the amendment to the Minister. Although I do not expect him to accept it tonight, it deals with an issue which he should seriously consider.

8.15 pm

Mr. Scott: I recognise that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has raised an important point, but amendment No. 4 is unnecessary because there is a general duty on the chief adjudication officer to provide advice and guidance. However, as we all know, adjudication officers have unfettered judgment in these matters.

Despite what the hon. Lady said, I accept that she was conveying the facts to me as they were presented to her. I have no reason to believe that adjudication officers are not imposing disqualification periods to reflect the merits of any particular case. When we extended the maximum period of disqualification from 13 to 26 weeks last year, we made it clear that we would wish to ascertain what effect that change had on the amounts of benefit claimants lost and on the behaviour of claimants. We set up arrangements to study the impact of the change.

During the past three months, we have carried out a survey which will provide information on the numbers and lengths of disqualifications imposed nationally and regionally. The results of that survey are being analysed. We also commissioned an independent agency, Social and Community Planning Research, to explore the impact of the change on decisions about leaving or taking work, as well as on the circumstances of those who are disqualified. I expect the results of both of the surveys to be available in the summer. Of course, they will be published and that will be the appropriate time for us to consider the matter.

Ms. Short: If the results of the survey show that almost universally people are disqualified for 26 weeks, which is an incredibly long period, and even the Government are persuaded that the hardship is too great, what action does the Minister propose to take? What is the point of the survey? What will he do if the results are bad?

Mr. Scott: However charmingly the hon. Lady presents it, I am certainly not going to be drawn into answering a hypothetical question. Let us establish the facts and then decide on the appropriate action.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not think that the Minister has answered the matter fairly. The chief adjudication officer said that legal advice confirms that he is unable to do more than guide adjudication officers on their general approach. However, I am quite confident that, unless the Minister is prepared to take some action, the issue will come up again. So that we can make progress, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave withdrawn.

Clause 10

INCOME SUPPORT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 7, line 45 after 'and', insert

', unless he is responsible for and a member of the same household as a child,'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 113, in page 8, line 4, at end add

'bearing in mind any limitations that may be imposed on a person by virtue of any physical, sensory or mental impairment'.

Mr. Flynn: The amendment strikes at the squalid heart of the Bill because clause 10 harbours outrageous new powers. Part of the new parrot cry of the Conservative party is its claim that it wants to make parents accountable for the crimes of their children, but clause 10 will chastise children for the faults of their parents. It is malevolent because it will deprive people of their only source of income. It sinks to new depths of incompetence, indifference and spite.

It has always been recognised that unemployment entitlement must be subject to certain conditions designed to show that the claimant has not become or remains unemployed through his or her deliberate action. That is understood and recognised by both sides of the House, but it has also been recognised that disqualification from unemployment benefit on those grounds should have some effect on entitlement to a minimum income under the means-tested fallback scheme—previously supplementary benefit and now income support.

Under the present rules, a person who leaves a job voluntarily without just cause or who refuses an offer of suitable employment loses all entitlement to employment benefit for up to 26 weeks—in most cases, it is a minimum of 26 weeks—but he or she can still claim income support, although not at the full rate, and subject to a reduction of 40 per cent. of the rate for a single person. That is accepted as a harsh, if not a punitive, disincentive for anyone to claim benefit when he is not available for work.

Many people would argue that the 40 per cent. reduction is excessive, especially when it is applied, as it usually is, for as far as we know, no one has ever suggested that it should be increased to a 100 per cent. reduction, leaving the claimant with no income to provide for his own needs and those of his family. That extreme penalty is imposed only when someone is claiming income support as an unemployed person and is judged not to be available for work at all and is not really unemployed. Clause 10 will extend that 100 per cent. penalty and the judgment of total destitution to people who are available for work but who have failed to satisfy a fairly junior civil servant that they have maintained an active search for jobs for at least 50 weeks of the year.

We are giving an extraordinary new power to junior civil servants to set up kangaroo courts in which they will detect offences, carry out interrogations and then preside, as judge and jury, over the case—subject to appeal. Even if one accepts that such an offence should be punishable by law, the penalty is wholly disproportionate. Twenty-six weeks'—a half year's—salary plus possible benefits for children is a formidable fine for any offence. The only safeguard against the worst effects of that massive penalty is a little-known, little-used and gossamer-weak provision

in the regulations, which provides that a person who is not available for work can nevertheless receive benefit if the claimant or a member of his family would otherwise suffer hardship.

The Minister has said that the provision might be extended to cover people not actively seeking employment, but the concept of a civil servant being able to cut off a person's sole source of income without inevitably causing hardship is nonsense. I accept that it is possible for that to happen in some rare cases where vast savings are available to fall back on. But it is nonsense to apply that to single claimants and arrant nonsense for those with families to support.

Amendment No. 5 concentrates on the threat posed by clause 10 to the families of unemployed people with dependent children. It does not wholly represent our views. We would like to get rid of clause 10 altogether, but, being practical people, we believe that the amendment is an attainable and reasonable end, even in terms of the way in which the Government see the Bill.

The case for exempting families with children from the effects of clause 10 is overwhelming. Even if it were right to punish an unemployed person for failure to take active steps for 50 weeks a year to search for work, it cannot be right to punish that person's children. The principle that children should not suffer for the sins—or imagined sins—of their parents is recognised in the rules relating to strikers' families. Those rules themselves have been changed disgracefully in recent years, imposing savage reductions in the benefits available for strikers' families, but even the present Government have not dared to withdraw those benefits altogether.

The effect of amendment No. 5 would not be to exempt people with children from the actively seeking employment test. They would still stand to lose entitlement to unemployment benefit. The amendment would mean that such people would be able to claim income support, and to receive it, if they could show that they were available for work. If a person refused a job without due cause, his income support would be subject to the usual stringent 40 per cent. reduction for voluntary unemployment. It cannot be argued that the amendment would open the floodgates to abuse. It would merely prevent the actively seeking work test from condemning children to utter destitution.

Mr. Kirkwood: I want to speak briefly on the effect that the Bill, as presently drafted, would have on those who are disabled. Amendment No. 113 seeks to insert the words:

"bearing in mind any limitations that may be imposed on a person by virtue of any physical, sensory or mental impairment."

That is an attempt to ensure that disability is taken into account in the actively seeking work test. We had important discussions on that in Committee. Some assurances were given, but only in relation to the prospective total exemption of disabled people from passing some of the tests to prove that they were actively seeking work.

Amendment No. 113 takes a slightly different tack and seeks to mitigate the test that will be applied to disabled people. That is important because we still do not know, with any certainty, just how active a person will have to be to prove that he is seeking employment. Against that background, it is right that we should consider the problems that disabled people may face. The regulations may, for example, require the person to accomplish tasks that are beyond his physical or other capacities as a result of disability. I am sure that the House agrees that it would be wrong to refuse benefit to disabled persons by virtue of their special behaviour in seeking work. They may not match the behaviour prescribed because they are suffering from disabilities.

Some of the problems were described in Committee. Difficulties would inevitably be experienced by people who are bound to spend their lives in wheelchairs. It would be unfair if there were requirements that necessitated them having access to places of work and methods of transport that were difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate in wheelchairs. It would be similarly unfair to require people to search out job opportunities by telephone or other means if they were deaf or blind, or had difficulty in writing and consequently needed help from someone without such impairments, who might not be available when required. Expecting someone to call regularly at a jobcentre where there may be no accessible transport is similarly unfair.

We received some assurances from the Minister that exemptions would be considered. The amendment seeks to improve the position by requiring some account to be taken of disability in the actively seeking work test. I hope that the Minister has had a chance to study our discussions in Committee and that he will be able to make some positive comments this evening.

Mr. Tony Banks: If someone is ruled to be not actively seeking work, will he lose his entitlement to all benefits unless he can demonstrate hardship? As the Minister knows, I was a member of the Standing Committee for a while until I was transferred to another Bill, so I was not present when clause 10 was debated. It seems outrageous that, if someone is ruled not to be actively seeking work, he could lose his right to all benefits unless he could prove hardship. Once again, humiliation is being heaped on people. Amendment No. 5 seeks to establish that, if somebody has family commitments, he will not have to demonstrate hardship. It will be immediately accepted, and the person will at least receive the 60 per cent.

I find it strange that two otherwise seemingly decent Ministers—I have described them as such several times, but I do not know whether they are deceiving me or whether I am being overly charitable—could allow such a situation to occur. At this stage, I assume that I am misreading the Bill and that that will not be the situation. I cannot believe that the Minister would allow someone to lose his benefit unless he could prove hardship and that he would be required to do so under the circumstances that we know exist, when people have to lay bare their private lives. I am assuming that the Minister will tell me that I am wrong, but if I am right I am assuming that the Minister will accept the amendment.

8.30 pm

Mr. Scott: I want to make it clear first that, whatever view the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) may take of my attitude, the situation now is no different from the situation that existed under previous Governments, including Labour Governments. It has always been clear that one's entitlement to what in those days was supplementary benefit was affected if one was not available for work. There was a reduction of 40 per cent. or in certain circumstances 20 per cent. in the personal rate

[Mr. Scott]

of the individual who was not satisfying the available for work test, which is now changed to the actively seeking work test.

Of course, the allowances paid for dependants of the family would not be affected. There is nothing new in that. There is also a provision in the income support legislation that claimants can receive benefit without having to be available for work if they are lone parents, or if they are looking after a child because the responsible adult is ill or temporarily absent from home, or looking after a member of the family who is temporarily ill. All those groups would be exempt from the requirement to be actively seeking work.

It seems bizarre to suggest that a couple with children should both be exempt from the need actively to be seeking work. If one tried to think of circumstances in which a family should be encouraged to provide income from employment, it would be where young children are in the household. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West considerably overstated things when he said that all the benefit will be taken away. If the benefit comprised the only resources available to the family, which is what the hon. Gentleman was predicating, it would obviously be difficult to pretend that there would not be hardship. Therefore, the hardship provision would come into effect and the benefit would be paid—and be reduced by either 20 per cent. or 40 per cent.—to the person who was not satisfying the condition, but the dependency additions would not be affected. That is precisely the same as circumstances that existed under Labour Governments.

Mrs. Beckett: First, although what the Minister is saying is right in terms of the background provisions working against the availability for work test, the whole point of having the actively seeking work test is that it is likely to be much more stringent and therefore much more likely to bite on people.

Secondly, surely my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is right in saying that people's rights to benefit will be removed from them under clause 10 if they are ruled not to be actively seeking work, although, as the Minister drifted into saying in his last few sentences, if they can show that there is hardship, they may get some income with which to support their family. That is not the same as talking as if it is an automatic process. We think that it should be an automatic process, and that is the purpose of the amendment that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has moved.

Mr. Scott: I am not saying that everything should stand still and that one should not, from time to time, consider such matters, but the hon. Lady was herself a member of Government—admittedly of one that applied the "availability" not the "actively seeking" test—who had exactly the same provisions to discourage people from resting on benefit instead of being in the business of getting themselves re-employed. I cannot accept amendment No. 5.

On amendment No. 113, in the name of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), it is fair to say that anybody claiming benefit on the basis of unemployment should be in the business of seeking work. That is what unemployment benefit is for: it is to help people who, through no fault of their own, become unemployed, and it is right that they should be encouraged to get back into work as soon as possible. I believe—I said this in Committee and I repeat it now—that that test will be applied fairly and reasonably.

Of course, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that we must take account of a wide variety of factors and a wide range of abilities and disabilities in reaching the decision. What we propose to do in regulations is to require that the claimant should show that he is looking for work by taking steps to secure the type of employment for which he is best suited and for which he is most likely to be recruited. If the claimant could not be expected to take any such step because physically or mentally it is beyond his capabilities, that would have to be taken into account in reaching a view about what is appropriate for him.

It is a question of balance. We do not want to write off people with disabilities and say that they cannot have any sort of work, but a judgment must be made about the sort of work that their handicap enables them to do. We shall write that, as well as other matters, into the regulations.

Another matter raised in Committee was the effect of homelessness on the sort of employment that people might be able to take. There will obviously be opportunities for us to discuss such issues under the affirmative procedure in due course when we discuss the regulations, but we are anxious to see that the regulations are drawn in such a way as to meet the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire.

Mr. Flynn: Obviously, the point is not getting through. The present deduction of 40 per cent. is made in cases where someone has, in the judgment that has been made, voluntarily made himself or herself lose a job, or where a claimant has given up a job. That punitive measure is then taken. At the moment, we allow the 100 per cent. deduction where people are not available for work and the conclusion is reached that the person is not really unemployed, but is working at another job. Our objection is that, if a junior clerk decides that someone is not actively seeking work—allowing for what has been said today, we know that claimants are allowed two weeks' holiday in which they need not be actively seeking work—because he or she has failed to keep the log up to date or has missed a certain week through inadvertence, neglect, or 101 perfectly acceptable reasons, the claimant is then subject to this punitive and harsh measure whereby he or she loses not only any benefit available to him or her, but also the entitlement to income support—as does the family.

That is our point. Although it was not said in Committee, as it stands at the moment, this clause will punish the person who is claimed to be not actively seeking work, and that punishment is harsh not only on that person, but on the family. That is what comes out clearly when we read and re-read the reports of the Committee stage.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman is wrong and, although on reflection and further study I think that he will discover that he is wrong, I cannot accept the amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Is the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) seeking to withdraw his amendment?

Mr. Flynn: No, we wish to press the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 152, Noes 265.

Division Number 179] **[8.37 pm**

AYES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Madden, Max
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard

Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 12

HOUSING BENEFIT SUBSIDY

Amendments made: No. 15 in page 8, line 21 after '(b)' insert

', other than those added by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989,'.

No. 17 in line 34, leave out 'within a prescribed period'.

No. 18 in line 36, at end insert

'and any such authority shall comply with prescribed requirements as to the time for making such an application.'.

No. 19 in line 37, leave out subsection (2C) and insert—

'(2C) Where a local authority would have been required to apply to a rent officer for determination under the Housing Act functions in a pre-commencement case, had the first regulations under subsection (2B) above come into force on 1st April 1989, regulations may make provision—

(a) requiring the authority in prescribed circumstances to apply within a prescribed period to the rent officer for that determination to be made; and

(b) requiring the rent officer in prescribed circumstances to make that determination on prescribed assumptions;

and in this subsection "pre-commencement case" means any case which arises before the date on which the first regulations under subsection (2B) above in fact come into force.'.

No. 20 in page 9, line 35, at end insert—

'(8CC) If the Secretary of State considers it reasonable to do so in any particular case, he may give the authority in question written notice extending any of the periods prescribed under subsection (8C) above for the purposes of paragraph (a), (b) or (c) of that subsection, as the case may be.'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Clause 16

UNAUTHORISED DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION RELATING TO PARTICULAR PERSONS

Amendments made: No. 63 in page 14, line 12 at end insert

'or in any corresponding enactment having effect in Northern Ireland'.

No. 64, in page 14, line 20, at end insert—

'(3A) It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under this section to prove that at the time of the alleged offence—

(a) he believed that he was making the disclosure in question with lawful authority and had no reasonable cause to believe otherwise; or

(b) he believed that the information in question had previously been disclosed to the public with lawful authority and had no reasonable cause to believe otherwise.'.

No. 65, in page 14, line 29, at end insert

'or in any corresponding enactment having effect in Northern Ireland'.

No. 66, in page 14, line 32, after 'Schedule', insert 'or that corresponding enactment'.

No. 67, in page 14, line 38, after 'Act', insert

'or in any corresponding enactment having effect in Northern Ireland'.

No. 68, in page 14, line 39, after 'Schedule' insert

'or any corresponding enactment having effect in Northern Ireland'.

No. 69, in page 14, line 44, at end insert—

'(aa) the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland;'.

No. 70, in page 14, line 45, at end insert—

'(bb) the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration;'.

No. 71, in page 15, line 1, at end insert—

'(ee) the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints;'.

No. 72, in page 15, line 2 after 'Office' insert—

'or of the Northern Ireland Audit Office,

(ff) any other person who carries out the administrative work of either of those Offices, or who provides, or is employed in the provision of, services to either of them;'.

No. 73, in page 15, line 4 leave out 'to (e)' and insert '(bb) and (c) to (ee)'.

No. 74, in page 15, line 9 leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

'(a) in accordance with his official duty—

(i) by a civil servant; or

(ii) by a person employed in the audit of expenditure or the investigation of complaints who does not fall within subsection (7)(ff) above;'.

No. 75, in page 15, line 12 'person', insert 'either (i)'.

No. 76, in page 15, line 16 leave out '(c)' and insert 'or (ii)'.

No. 77, in page 15, line 25 at end insert

'and includes a reference to "the person responsible" within the meaning of any corresponding enactment having effect in Northern Ireland.'.

No. 105, in page 15, line 31, leave out from '1983' to 'as' in line 34 and insert

'or any corresponding enactment having effect in Northern Ireland,

(c) by a Scottish mental health custodian, that is to say—

(i) a curator bonis, tutor or judicial factor, or

(ii) the managers of a hospital acting on behalf of that person under section 94 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, or

(d) by a mental health appointee, that is to say—

(i) a person directed or authorised as mentioned in paragraph (a) of rule 41(1) of the Court of Protection Rules 1984 or any similar appointee in Northern Ireland, or

(ii) a receiver ad interim appointed under paragraph (b) of that rule, or any similar appointee in Northern Ireland,

the appropriate person is the attorney, receiver, custodian or appointee,'.

No. 80, in page 15, line 36, at end insert—

'(10) This section shall come into force with the repeal of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911.'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Schedule 1

PERSONS EMPLOYED IN SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION OR ADJUDICATION

Amendments made: No. 83, in page 24, line 37, at end insert—

'A benefit officer.

An insurance officer.'.

No. 84, in page 25, line 10, after 'or', insert—

'to occupational or personal pension schemes or to'.

No. 85, in page 25, line 12, after 'above' insert—

'"occupational pension scheme" has the meaning given by section 66(1) of the Pensions Act;

"personal pension scheme" has the meaning given by section 84(1) of the 1986 Act; and'.

No. 86, in page 25, line 16, at end insert—

'or related to the former supplementary benefit'.

No. 27, in page 25, line 19, leave out 'by persons in it'.

No. 87, in page 25, line 23, after 'to', insert '(a)'.

No. 88, in page 25, line 27, at end insert—

'; or

(b) the tax treatment of occupational or personal pension schemes, as defined in paragraph 1(2) above.'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Clause 19

RECOVERY OF SUMS EQUIVALENT TO BENEFIT FROM COMPENSATION PAYMENTS IN RESPECT OF ACCIDENTS, INJURIES AND DISEASES

Mr. Flynn: I beg to move amendment No. 104, in page 16, line 13, at end insert

"(less any amount by which the compensation payment would have been greater but for the contributory negligence of the victim".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 6, in page 16, leave out lines 42 and 43 and insert—

'(c) only to the extent that any part of the payment is, or in prescribed circumstances is deemed to be, for a prescribed purpose other than reimbursement for costs incurred in procuring the payment and does not exceed the amount of benefit, determined under subsection (1)(a) above, paid or likely to be paid for the same purpose,

but'.

Mr. Flynn: In view of the disagreement that we had on a previous amendment, there is a real prospect of a collapse of understanding between the two sides of the House. It was apparent in Committee that we were not talking about the same thing. Clause 19 is a fine example of how a Government bent on reform will act. We must say a grudging word of congratulation because the Government have tackled an extremely difficult problem. However, if one decides to do that, there is always a great danger that one will make the position worse. In many ways the Government have turned an untidy state of affairs into an unjust one and created chaos out of confusion. In Committee we withdrew an amendment similar to amendment No. 104 so that the Government might think again and so that good sense might prevail. The example given by the Minister in Committee was faulty.

The two areas involved in the clause are the possibility of over-compensation, a dread area of Tory demonology, and the possibility of someone getting away with something, especially someone who is not well off. The Government are worried that someone may gain a few pennies to which he is not strictly entitled. Because state benefits and compensation for accidents are given for different purposes, there is a serious conflict. It is impossible to match the two awards. It is like mixing oil with water. Compensation for damages is awarded for pain, for suffering, for loss of amenity and for loss of standing in the labour market. Social security benefits are paid for different purposes—for additional needs arising from disability or to meet losses that are suffered inevitably because of absence from the labour market.

The objection of the Minister of State to a similar amendment in Committee was that it might result in the dread over-compensation. He gave an example of what he called the perverse result that the suggested system would achieve, citing a case in which compensation was reduced from £10,000 to £5,000 due to contributory negligence and the injured party had received £2,000 in social security benefits. Under the Government's proposal the compensation of £5,000 would be reduced by a further £2,000 so that the Department of Social Security could get its money back and the person would receive £5,000 in total—£3,000 in compensation and £2,000 in benefit. The Minister continued on the same basis:

"if we follow the line taken by the amendment, the person would end up with £6,000, rather than £5,000. He would be over-compensated in total and the taxpayer would have to make up the difference."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 2 March 1989; c. 867.]

The Minister was wrong in Committee about the effect of the amendment.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Is it not a fact that compensation is meant to pay for the physical injuries that a person has suffered and for the diminution in his earning power? Surely it is not meant to compensate the Government for benefits paid. Would it not be fairer if the Government accepted that compensation is a separate entity and that benefit should continue to be paid? This will clearly be a problem following the Hillsborough disaster.

Mr. Flynn: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the very point that I was about to make. The effect of the amendment would be to reduce the amount of benefit repayable to the DSS by the full amount of compensation lost due to contributory negligence. In the case that the Minister cited, the compensation payment was reduced by £5,000 due to contributory negligence. In those circumstances, the repayment of benefit would not arise unless the benefit amounted to more than £5,000 so that the total amount paid in compensation and benefit exceeded the figure at which damages were assessed. The total amount paid in the case that the Minister cited would be £10,000. None of it would be repayable, so the person would end up with £7,000, not £6,000, but it does not matter whether the total is £6,000 or £7,000 because the person has actually lost £10,000.

I would need visual aids to explain the point properly. If we decide that the loss is £10,000, that is the loss—the total amount of money from whatever source, whether it be security or compensation—which should be paid unless one takes the view that people ought not be compensated for any injury unless someone else was to blame. That is where we get into the strange and difficult interface between two benefits—compensation and social security. Such a decision would be startling and runs contrary to all the principles on which the social security system has always operated. A person who claims benefit as a result of food poisoning does not have to prove that someone poisoned his soup—he has to prove only that he is ill. The same applies to industrial injuries. The whole point of the industrial injuries scheme was to get away from the need to prove that the employer was to blame. If the injury arises from the job, benefit is payable in full whether or not there is contributory negligence on the part of the victim.

The logic of the Minister's argument is that someone who carelessly walks out on the road, is run over and is confined to a wheelchair for the next 40 years would not be allowed to draw income support, let alone invalidity benefit or mobility allowance, because there was 100 per cent. contributory negligence. According to the Minister, any benefit payment would be over-compensation. If that means anything, it must mean that a person has received more than he or she lost as a result of the injury. If that can be proved, there may be a case for the compensator or the DSS to recover part of the money.

Amendment No. 104 seeks to remove from the scope of clause 19 cases in which there is no possibility of over-compensation because the amount deducted for contributory negligence is more than the amount received in benefit. I can anticipate what the Minister will say about the practicalities because unless the compensation is determined by the court nobody will know what precise deduction has been made for contributory negligence. However, we had a great deal of evidence that in many cases the division was not made between compensation and deductions for contributory negligence. The Minister is creating a new situation. It is very much his problem. If he cannot find a solution that is both practical and fair, the recruitment arrangements cannot be operated in a proper way. The Government should accept that they have yet to find the proper answer and abandon the whole proposal.

9 pm

The Minister may also repeat his statement in Committee that the Government proposals were in accord with what Beveridge recommended in 1942. We have had an opportunity to re-read what Beveridge said in his report. The question of contributory negligence, which is crucial to the amendment, is not dealt with but at the end of that section of the report Beveridge wrote:

> "It is not possible in this report to do more than to raise these questions. Considered answers can be given only by inquiry by some Committee with technical and practical qualifications and with time to examine all the detailed areas involved."

It is wrong, therefore, to treat Beveridge as the final authority on this matter. In fact the compromise solution adopted in the Law Reform (Personal Injuries) Act 1948 took into account contributory negligence, deliberately departing from Beveridge's very tentative recommendations. We look forward to hearing how the Minister intends to find a solution which makes some practical sense or that he will withdraw the clause.

Amendment No. 6 was again similar to the one at Committee. We ran into difficulties and objections from the Minister, who suggested with some effrontery that it might produce a situation which was "excessively bureaucratic and legalistic". The Government are the authors of the change, so the obligation is again on them to achieve it without injustice. Unamended, the clause will certainly cause serious injustice.

Amendment No. 6 seeks to avoid the taking away of benefit which had been properly awarded and received. As the clause stands, benefits paid for one reason can be recovered out of compensation payments made for an entirely different purpose or even taken out of payments which are not compensation but reimbursement of the victim's costs. In Committee the case of Parry *v* Cleaver was cited, which provided that one should take away only those things that are like from like.

The amendments that we put to the Committee were unacceptable, but they were not answered fully. The whole basis of the Government's argument is the need to avoid double compensation. If a person suffers an injury and receives social security benefits to compensate for loss of earnings and a payment of damages for pain and suffering, the payments of benefits and damages are for different and mutually exclusive purposes and cannot, therefore, be double compensation.

The Government's proposals might possibly be defensible if all the victims of personal injuries received full compensation through the courts. Social security benefits would then be a kind of interim payment that it would be reasonable to deduct from the final compensation payment. However, in practice hardly anyone gets full compensation. Once again, the question of contributory negligence arises. That can result in the victim receiving partial compensation under a number of different heads of damages. If the whole of the benefits are recovered out of that partial compensation, it can mean, for example, that attendance and mobility allowances are recovered from damages that are paid for loss of earnings. That cannot be right.

The most blatantly unfair aspect of the proposal is the treatment of costs. Whatever justification there may be for recovering social security benefits out of payments of compensation for injury, there can be no conceivable justification for recovering them out of payments of legal costs. Yet the Government not only intend to do that, but actually amended the Bill in Committee to remove any

doubt as to their intention. The amendment had the effect of adding to the definition of a "compensation payment" the words:

"and includes, in particular, so much of the payment as represents reimbursement for costs incurred in procuring it."

Amendment 6 would remove those words.

Mr. Bermingham: Has it not always been a fundamental principle of English law that where one succeeds in one's action one is entitled to succeed in one's action for costs? Is my hon. Friend saying that the Government are suggesting that because one is returned to status quo—that is, no costs—they have a lien on the money that one receives and that theoretically one could be put at a loss through winning one's case?

Mr. Flynn: That is precisely the Government's intention, and it will certainly be the effect of the amendment. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) making a contribution on that point.

The Minister argued in Committee that there should, in practice, be no problem in that area. The amount to be recovered should fall within the normal payments, excluding costs. That may prove to be true in most cases, but certainly not in every case. There will be cases in which the whole of the compensation payment, including the costs element, will be handed over to the DSS. That is especially likely in cases which take several years to settle, during which a large sum has been paid in benefits and substantial costs have been incurred. In such cases, the victim could end up not only without any compensation, but with a debt for legal fees. A bizarre situation could be created.

On that point as on many others, the Minister's main argument in Committee was that most compensation payments could not be divided into their constituent elements and, therefore, it was impractical to operate the like from like principle. Again, we appreciate the difficulty. That is probably the reason why no one has tackled this for a long time, but if it is impractical to operate that principle, either generally or in relation to cost—if it cannot be made to work fairly—that is no excuse for allowing this ragbag to go forward, which will work unfairly and unjustly and will breach long-established principles of British justice.

Mr. Bill Michie: I want to follow what my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) said about tried and tested traditions and the values that we have held in the past. Anyone who has represented people who have had problems through damage to their bodies caused at, for example, work will know that the compensation for victims of accident and disease is calculated on general damages for pain, suffering and loss of amenity; special damages, which are the financial losses calculated up to date of trial or settlement, including loss of earnings; loss of earning capacity, where, for example, the injury puts the victim at a disadvantage on the open labour market; loss of services, where, for example, a mother is unable to perform household duties to the pre-accident extent; and future financial losses, which are, for example, loss of earnings, pension loss and future expenses. All those have been valued in the past, but many are put in jeopardy by the clause.

For the past 41 years, the victim has given credit to the compensator for one half of the value of the relevant state benefit for up to five years from the date of accident, but that is only as against the loss of the earning claim. Under the present proposal, victims will have gross statutory sick pay and the prescribed benefit paid for a period of up to five years—depending on the date of settlement—deducted from the total compensation payment, even if the victim recovers compensation on the basis of less than 100 per cent. compensation. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West emphasised. It is not as if the victim receives 100 per cent. compensation and value for money. Under the Government's proposals, all victims will be affected, whether they receive 100 per cent., 5 per cent. or 20 per cent. compensation.

I could quote many examples, but I have been asked to be brief to allow other hon. Members to contribute. However, I want to refer to the example of a man who is claiming general damages for pain, suffering and loss of amenities in the sum of £20,000. His special damages include loss of earnings and loss of earning capacity of £5,000. They also include loss of future pension for which he receives £2,000. His pre-accident net earnings were £200 a week. He is off work for two years and receives company sick pay of £150 a week for six months and £75 a week for the subsequent six months. He receives no company sick pay for the second year's absence. He returns to work after two years, suffering a partial loss of earnings of £50 a week for two years. He receives statutory sick pay of £1,260 and sickness and invalidity benefit of £5,000. He also receives a reduced earnings allowance of £4,500 and industrial disablement benefit of £4,000 until the date of the settlement five years after the accident. Due to the serious medical condition, the case is not capable of earlier settlement. As the law stands, before the Bill is enacted, that man's full liability would be £39,140. Under the new set-up, when the Bill is enacted, he will receive £32,390.

As the percentage of compensation is reduced from 100 per cent., the victim receives less. At liability of 25 per cent., the man would receive at least £9,785. Under the new system, he would receive nothing at that level of compensation. It would all be clawed back. We tried to express that problem several times in Committee, but unfortunately to no avail.

There are many injustices in clause 19. One hundred per cent. state benefits paid to victims partially to replace income will be deducted from total compensation. The compensation will be recovered for even part payments for damages. Even if payments are very small, they will still be clawed back until someone is likely to lose more money by making a claim than by not making one.

The better-off victim who receives a fairly decent settlement would not claim social security benefit. However, the poor victim who has nothing must claim benefit, but he is penalised when he claims compensation to which, under the old law, he was entitled.

My colleagues from the Amalgamated Engineering Union have had meetings and discussed these points. We have experience of industrial injuries. The AEU has a great record in that respect. The union is worried that the injustice will affect nearly all compensation claims in the long run. The Government should accept the amendment and, therefore, protect people who are already in a traumatic state as a result of their injuries. Even at this late stage, I hope that the Government will change their minds and accept the amendment.

Mr. Bermingham: I had not proposed to intervene in the debate until I saw the purport of the amendments and the purport of the clause. I should declare a passing interest as I am a member of the legal profession. Over the years I have been involved in many civil settlements, particularly when I was a solicitor in Sheffield.

I do not believe that the Government or the parliamentary draftsmen have any comprehension of how the system of settlement actually works. It is not cut and dried. In the vast majority of agreed settlements, no specific figure is agreed for contributory negligence. We try to find a sum of money to compensate the injured party for the injuries he has suffered. In the old days half the benefits were taken into account in the assessment calculation. However, costs followed the event. If I read the clause correctly—and I hope that the Minister will disabuse me in due course if my interpretation is wrong—all social security benefits will be included in the assessment. Where there has been a finding of contributory negligence, that will lie against the net figure due to the claimant after the deduction for contributory negligence.

9.15 pm

If we had been wise enough years ago to follow the Pearson report on no-fault liability, all these problems would have disappeared. The Government are trying to stretch their clammy hands to claw back any compensation. If someone is injured through the fault of another, that person must be the loser. The state will lose not a penny. The old compensation that would have been paid will no longer flow to the injured party.

The clause even claws back costs. That shows the draftsmens' ignorance and I can say that quite cold bloodedly. They do not seem to understand that in calculating whether to pursue a case the first question that any competent lawyer will ask himself is whether he will succeed in securing some compensation.

Mr. Bill Michie: Is my hon. Friend saying that somewhere in another place they will have a field day because of the legal technicalities and bad drafting?

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend reads my mind perfectly and he knows me well.

Any competent lawyer will say to himself very gently, "Because of the length of the period of the claims to benefit, it may not be worth pursuing the claim." Any competent lawyer will say that he cannot leave his client in a position where, because of the clawback even against costs awarded, even if the client will receive a notional sum in settlement of the claim—for the sake of argument let us say £20,000, with costs of £5,000—unfortunately, because the client has been on benefit for five years, the DSS—and one is tempted to say that the Department is aptly named—will receive all the £25,000 in payment. Effectively the victim will be £5,000 out of pocket simply for pursuing the claim. That is ludicrous. The Government must reconsider.

I will digress a little now because I have an interest in these matters as the hon. Member for St. Helens, South. What will happen to the contributions made to victims of disasters such as Piper Alpha or Hillsborough where many people on Merseyside and from St. Helens were killed or injured? There may be trusts that do not have charitable status and money may be paid out. Will the DSS try to claw back money paid to people who have suffered grievous loss through no fault of their own? Will the Government take their cut from the tragedy?

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): That is highly unlikely because of the emotional attitude of people throughout the country.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Oh, I do not know.

Mr. Orme: My hon. Friend may disagree with me there. However, does my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) agree that benefits or payments that are decided and compensation that is set by judges are different from funds connected to major disasters to which my hon. Friend has just referred? There are two standards in our nation at the moment: one for people who are affected by major disasters and will, with the help of their solicitors, quite rightly gain compensation; and one for people who, in industry, lose an arm, leg or hand and are up against a scale of payments which will be charged against the benefits that he or she receives.

Mr. Bermingham: My right hon. Friend makes a fair point. In a major disaster the heart of the nation goes out to the victims and the nation seeks to give generously. I seek a cold-blooded assurance from the Minister tonight that the generosity of the nation will not be used to compensate the cost to the Government in benefit. That would be morally indefensible. I ask the Minister quite bluntly for that assurance tonight on behalf of those people, in Merseyside and elsewhere, who have lost loved ones or have suffered grievous harm. If the Minister wants to intervene and give that assurance I shall be delighted to give way. Many in the nation seek, and have sought, that assurance but, unfortunately, it has not always been forthcoming. In such circumstances, rule books should occasionally be torn up.

Mr. Scott: I was going to deal with the matter in my concluding remarks, but as the hon. Gentleman has raised it, it might be acceptable and sensible to get it out of the way. The clause deals with compensation payments made by, or on behalf of, a person who is liable for an injury. It has nothing to do with charitable payments. Anyone who has seen the response of this country to the Hillsborough tragedy and others that, alas, we have seen recently will know that those are totally different circumstances. The funds relating to such tragedies have nothing to do with the clause.

Mr. Bermingham: I am grateful to the Minister for intervening in that way. Perhaps I should put the question more bluntly. Of course, compensation payments ultimately fall due to the families of those involved in the tragedy who are either injured or dead. If the Minister is assuring me that the Department will have no claim against payments paid out of the Hillsborough disaster fund, I will accept it. The Minister nods, but let us have it straight for the record so that we know exactly where we stand. Will the Minister intervene again and confirm that there will be no claims for the recovery of benefit against money paid from the Hillsborough trust—whether or not it is a charitable trust? I recognise that there is a difference in law between a charitable and non-charitable trust.

Mr. Scott: The answer is an unequivocal yes.

Mr. Bermingham: I am grateful to the Minister for that assurance. I am sure that it will bring some crumb of comfort to those of my constituents who have been grievously injured.

I shall end on a practical note. Have the Minister and his officials cared to think for a moment about the effect of the unamended clause on settlement and damages claims in the courts of our land? It would not be sensible in future for lawyers—either solicitors or counsel—to settle at the current rates of settlement. The clause effectively encourages lawyers to argue further over the degree of contributory negligence, because that will become a material argument in the future. In the past on many occasions settlements have been amicable. It also means that, in future, those who act on behalf of the plaintiff—this may affect my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme)—particularly in industrial injury claims in non-disaster cases, will no longer allow their clients to settle for the existing sums of money. Those who appear on behalf of the plantiff seek to compensate the injured and return them to the state they were in before the injury. If, in the future, the Department of Social Security is to recover even greater sums, the general level of damages will have to rise.

The Minister and those who advise him have failed to understand that the premiums paid to insurers will equally have to rise to meet the anticipated increased claims. They have failed to realise that premiums have to be paid by the employers and that is an additional cost which forces up the price of the product being made and makes it less competitive.

I know the Minister well. He is an honourable man and I am sure that the clause is not the product of his mind because he is too decent. Those who drafted the clause have not thought it through because it does not go far enough. Even if amended, the clause will effectively increase the cost of products in industry and make us less competitive. We, the general public and the citizens of the United Kingdom will be the losers. This is another example of dogma leading us towards penury.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): I shall delay the House for one moment to clarify one aspect of the clause.

First, I want to thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his statement on the Hillsborough tragedy. The item came up on "The News at One" today, and there was a suggestion that the social security department in Sheffield was unsure as to the exact position.

When we were debating the Bill in Committee, my hon. Friend the Minister of State made the point that the object of the clause was to ensure that nobody received double compensation, particularly since social security benefit is paid from public money. I do not quarrel with that. When awarding damages—particularly in cases of medical negligence, although this could equally apply to injury compensation—the payment is made some time, even years, after the event. Will the judge who awards the damages be aware of the social security benefits that have been paid to the person who is to receive the damages, or will he or she presume that what is being awarded is from the date of settlement? Is this really double compensation, or does the compensation for damages given by the judge run from the end of the case, so that the period during which the case was being heard is not necessarily covered by the damages?

I suggest to my hon. Friend that if, as he appears to be arguing, the compensation runs from the date of the injury, it would seem reasonable that the judge should be presented with a figure for the amount of social security benefit already paid to the victim, so that he can allow for it when deciding the final figure that he is prepared to offer in compensation for damages.

9.30 pm

Mr. Scott: I listened with interest and respect to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), because he knows something about this area and is a practitioner of the law. He accused the Government of not having thought this through and of having got it wrong. I do not believe that that is right; nor did the National Audit Office, which looked into this, nor did the Public Accounts Committee, which also looked into it; nor have the courts, which have considered this matter, come to a different conclusion from the Government's. They have all come to a view that reflects that of Sir William Beveridge, who stated in his report:

> "An injured person should not have the same need met twice over. He should get benefit at once without prejudice to any alternative remedy, but if the alternative remedy proves in fact to be available, he should not in the end get more from two sources together than he would have got from one alone".

That is the principle on which we worked when producing the scheme and when seeking one that was relatively simple to operate.

To answer my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson), we shall of course give the courts details of benefits paid up to the date of settlement or award. I shall return to that point later. One reason why much of our discussion in Committee was unsoundly based and why these amendments would have a perverse outcome is that 99 per cent. of settlements take place outside the courts and only 1 per cent. of cases are considered in court. I believe that someone was unkind enough to use the words "horse trading" to describe the negotiations to settle compensation claims. Those engaged in such negotiations would know perfectly well the amount of benefit that would have been available.

The two amendments deal with matters that we discussed in Committee. As far as legal costs are concerned, in schedule 3 we have specifically provided that if, by any chance, someone on legal aid found that his legal aid costs were more than the compensation payment so that the victim was left with a bill, the Department of Social Security would meet any outstanding amounts. It would be intolerable if a very poor person, having resorted to legal aid, was left with a bill to pay. That would be unlikely, but if it happens we have made it perfectly clear in the schedule that the problem would be dealt with in the way I have described.

Mr. Bermingham: Does not the Minister accept that many industrial claims are brought in the name of the trade union, which employs solicitors and covers the costs, because they are its costs? That is one of the benefits of trade union membership. So there is a distinction between a litigant in that position and a litigant in receipt of legal aid.

I think the Minister has missed the point that I was trying to make. Is he saying that the benefit accruing to the union when recovering its costs on behalf of its member is in some way to be laid at the door of the claimant who succeeds in obtaining damages? That would be appalling.

Mr. Scott: I am not familiar with the arrangements between unions and their members for these matters. Unions have funds and their members pay dues in part to cover the costs of this sort of action. If people have a legal aid bill or have employed private lawyers, because so few cases are determined by the courts and there are no heads of agreement on what a settlement is, it is difficult to break down——

Mr. Bermingham: Does not the Minister accept that, even in a friendly case which is settled out of court—a case that does not involve a minor, which would require court approval for a settlement—the successful plaintiff's costs are always paid by the defendant? Therefore, considerable amounts of money that do not belong to the plaintiff become liable to the charge that the Minister seeks to impose in this clause.

Mr. Scott: We have taken the view, which I believe is right, that the benefit paid should be recovered from the settlement. That is what a number of independent people who have looked at the issue said was the right way to go about it, and we are following their advice.

I do not want to teach my grandmother to suck eggs, but it was apparent from what the hon. Gentleman said about extra costs and so on that he has not read the Touche Ross report about how the costs are broken down. I do not accept every figure in the Touche Ross report, but the matter was carefully considered. The Government did not take a leap in the dark. Only after looking carefully at the costs and at the advice that we received from a variety of sources did we decide that this was a fair and sensible approach.

At the moment we have a muddle. The 1948 legislation provided for some offsets against a list of benefits, but the courts have decided that, on a number of other benefits that have been introduced since then, 100 per cent. should be recovered from any compensation payment. That applies not just up to the date of the settlement or award, as we are providing here, but to future entitlement to benefit which can be offset against the settlement that has been made. On balance, some 80 per cent. of victims receiving compensation could find themselves at least as well off as before or even better off, because there is no offsetting of future benefits against this. At the moment benefits are offset for five years, and sometimes ahead of that. On average, 80 per cent. of cases are settled within two and a half years—a pattern that I would expect to continue. In those circumstances, many people will find themselves better off than they would be under the existing system.

The vast majority of these cases are dealt with out of court, with only 1 per cent. being decided by a judge. I think that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) recognised that in some circumstances there may be difficulties in matching heads of damages awards and the payment of benefit. That is a fair understatement of the real problems that face the Department when it has to make great inquiries into the various heads of damages that have been awarded. But the hon. Member for St. Helens, South must know that negotiations continue and the victim is offered a global sum to settle. No calcuation of how that figure has been arrived at is stated. That would be impossible because of the informality.

I do not want to delay the House unduly, but both amendments would be perverse in their effects. They would undermine the simplicity and the underlying fairness of the system that we are introducing, endorsed by Beveridge, the Public Accounts Committee, the National Audit Office and the courts. In those circumstances, I shall in due course be advising the House to reject the amendments.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): The Minister should not use Beveridge and others to justify this move by the Government to reclaim benefits from people who receive only a small amount of benefit in any case. The hon. Gentleman says that he is not sure what the trade unions do. My trade union, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, has spent a great deal of money representing people injured in industry and elsewhere in reclaiming benefits. It has to go to court to do so. Amounts are determined by the judge on the basis on whether the person has lost an arm, a leg, a hand or whatever. We then see other people getting £1 million even though they have not lost any faculty. I assure the Minister that people regard this move by the Government as a gross injustice.

Mr. Scott: I do not agree. Of course anybody who takes any notice of these things will know that there may be a capricious element in the compensation that people get for injury or disease, depending on the circumstances. I cannot put all that to rights in this legislation. I can only follow up what Beveridge recommended. That could not be agreed at the end of the war, but others of great authority have endorsed the principle that people are certainly entitled to benefit in the short term, when they need money immediately to pay their own and their families living expenses. But when, finally, a person is judged to have been guilty, or has accepted liability, the taxpayer, having provided interim support, should not be left with the compensation bill. I believe that that is an unassailable principle. It has been strongly endorsed, and I invite the House to reject the two amendments.

Mr. Flynn: The Minister persists in quoting Beveridge, so I must quote back at him Beveridge's conclusion that it was not possible to do more than raise these questions. Beveridge reached no conclusions whatever; he simply stated the problems. We all agree that one of his recommendations was that there should not be any question of double compensation at anyone's expense—and certainly not at the expense of the social security system. But the Minister has again failed to make the case in answer to our point that, in respct of contributory negligence, there is no question of over-compensation unless the amount is beyond what is decided as the gross amount. If damages are set at £10,000, and the figure is reduced by any amount because of contributory negligence, that is no excuse for trying to bridge the gap by taking away money due in social security benefit.

There is another point that is very revealing. When an event such as the Hillsborough disaster occurs, we all feel bereaved. While we share the grief of the families involved in that, it would be foolish to ignore the tens of thousands of individuals injured just as grievously elsewhere. People just as unfortunate, just as poor and just as badly hurt will lose social security payments in a way that has never been known before.

I am very grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), who rightly pointed out the problems that will occur as a result of this legislation. Of course the amendments that we are

proposing are not enough. A whole battery of changes were proposed in Committee. Had they been accepted, they would have improved the Bill greatly and softened its damaging effect. The Minister and the Department are trying to mix two elements, two heads of damages, which cannot be mixed. They are trying to achieve a fusion. While fusion may well have been achieved at room temperature in another area, the fusion that is being attempted here will produce a cocktail so volatile that it will explode in their faces.

We intend to press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 158, Noes 277.

Division No. 180] **[9.43**

AYES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David

Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 26, in page 16, line 44, at end insert—

'"compensator", "victim" and "intended recipient" shall be construed in accordance with subsection (1) above;'.

No. 11, in page 16, line 44, at end insert—

'"costs", in relation to proceedings in Scotland, means expenses;'.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Schedule 3

Recovery of Sums Equivalent to Benefit from Compensation Payments in respect of Accidents etc: Supplementary Provision

Amendments made: No. 55, in page 30, leave out line 38.

No. 89, in page 33, line 18, at end insert—

'Structured settlements

6A.—(1) This paragraph applies where—

(a) in final settlement of a person's claim, an agreement is entered into—

(i) for the making of periodical payments (whether of an income or capital nature) to or in respect of the victim; or

(ii) for the making of such payments and one or more lump sum payments; and

(b) apart from this paragraph, those payments would fall to be regarded for the purposes of the recoupment provisions as compensation payments.

(2) Where this paragraph applies, the recoupment provisions (other than this paragraph) shall have effect on the following assumptions, that is to say—

(a) the relevant period in the case of the compensator in question shall be taken to end (if it has not previously done so) on the day of settlement;

(b) the compensator in question shall be taken—

(i) to have been liable to make on that day a single compensation payment of the amount referred to in section 19(1)(a) of this Act (reduced or increased in accordance with such of the recoupment provisions as would have applied in the case of a payment on that day); and

(ii) to have made from that single payment a relevant deduction of an amount equal to it; and

(c) the payments under the agreement referred to in sub-paragraph (1) above that shall be taken to be exempt payments.

(3) The intended recipient shall not by virtue of anything in this paragraph become entitled to be paid any sum, whether by the compensator or the Secretary of State, and if on a review or appeal under paragraph 15 or 17 below it appears that the amount paid by a compensator in pursuance of this paragraph either exceeded or was less than it ought to have been, then—

(a) any excess shall be repaid to the compensator instead of to the intended recipient; but

(b) any deficiency shall be paid to the Secretary of State by the intended recipient.

(4) Where any further compensation payment falls to be made to or in respect of the victim otherwise than under the agreement in question, sub-paragraph (2)(a) above shall be disregarded for the purpose of determining the end of the relevant period in relation to that further payment.

(5) In any case where—

(a) the person making the periodical payments (the "secondary party") does so in pursuance of arrangements entered into with another (as in a case where an insurance company purchases an annuity for the victim from another such company), and

(b) apart from those arrangements, that other ("the primary party") would have been regarded as the compensator,

then for the purposes of the recoupment provisions, the primary party shall be regarded as the compensator and the secondary party shall not be so regarded.

(6) In determining for the purposes of this paragraph whether any periodical payments would fall to be regarded as compensation payments, section 19(4)(a) of this Act shall be disregarded.

(7) In this paragraph "the day of settlement" means—

(a) if the agreement referred to in sub-paragraph (1) above is approved by a court, the day on which that approval is given; and

(b) in any other case, the day on which that agreement is entered into.'.

No. 92, in page 34, line 21, leave out

'deduction from, or payment out of,'

and insert

'relevant deduction or payment in connection with'.

No. 93, in page 34, line 27, leave out 'withhold from the' and insert

'either—

(i) withhold from such a'.

No. 94, in page 34, line 28, leave out 'and' and insert 'or

(ii) make such a payment into court before the certificate of total benefit has been issued to him; and'.

No. 95, in page 34, line 32, after 'person,' insert 'making a payment into court'.

No. 96, in page 34, line 33, leave out '(2)(a) above, he shall' and insert

'(2)(a)(i) above—

(a) he shall, at the time when he makes that payment,'.

No. 97, in page 34, line 34, after 'and', insert '(b)'.

No. 98, in page 34, leave out lines 36 and 37 and—

'but no person shall be entitled by virtue of this sub-paragraph to the payment out of court of any amount which has not in fact been paid into court.

(3A) Where a payment into court is made as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2)(a)(ii) above, the compensator—

(a) shall apply for the certificate of total benefit no later than the day on which the payment into court is made; and

(b) shall become liable to make the relevant payment as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2)(b) above, notwithstanding that the relevant deduction has not been made.

(3B) Where any such payment into court as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (2) above is paid out of court to or for the other party to the action within the initial period, then, as respects the compensator in question, the relevant period whall be taken to have ended on the day on which the payment into court was made.

(3C) In sub-paragraph (3B) above "the initial period" means the period of 21 days following the making of the payment into court, but rules of court may make provision varying the length of that period.

(3D) Rules of court may make provision regulating or prescribing the practice and procedure to be followed in relation to such payments into court as are mentioned in sub-paragraph (2) above.'.

No. 28, in page 35, line 18, leave out

'requests the Secretary of State to furnish him with'

and insert

'applies to the Secretary of State in accordance with paragraph 3 above for'.

No. 29, in page 35, line 20, leave out 'comply with that request' and insert

'furnish him with such a certificate'.

No. 30, in page 35, line 22, leave out 'request' and insert 'application'.

No. 31, in page 35, line 26, leave out 'request' and insert 'application'.

No. 32, in page 35, line 36, leave out 'the relevant'.

No. 12, in page 37, line 8, after '1981', insert

'or section 12 of the Administration of Justice Act 1982'.

No. 33, in page 38, line 15, leave out 'the victim' and insert 'a person'.

No. 34, in page 38, line 17, leave out 'the victim' and insert 'a person'.

No. 90, in page 38, line 44, leave out 'the amount so certified' and insert 'that relevant payment'.

No. 91, in page 40, line 21, after 'Where', insert

', immediately before the making of the compensation payment,'.

No. 13, in page 41, line 2, at end insert—

'*Modification of Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985*

22. In section 31 of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 (vesting of debtor's estate at date of sequestration) in subsection (8) after the words "subsection (9) below" there shall be inserted the words "and to paragraph 7(2) of Schedule 3 to the Social Security Act 1989."'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Schedule 4

Employment-related Schemes for Pensions or other Benefits: Equal Treatment for Men and Women

Mr. John Watts (Slough): I beg to move, amendment No. 62, in page 41, line 45, at end insert

'(h) any permitted difference on the basis of the sex of members, in the level of benefit payable from any employment-related benefit scheme which has an equal normal pension age for men and women which is lower than 65, between the ages of 60 and 65. Any difference in the level of benefit payable shall be a permitted difference if it does not exceed an amount equal to the basic state pension in force under the state scheme from time to time.'.

The Bill implements a European directive requiring equal treatment for men and women in pension schemes. However—

It being Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That at this day's sitting, the Social Security Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), again considered.

Mr. Watts: Equal treatement does not extend to equal retirement ages, so the discrimination against men in the state retirement scheme and in other pension schemes, where it exists, will be allowed to continue. However, many enlightened employers, such as the Mars group, an important employer in my constituency, have followed a policy of equal retirement ages for men and women and equal benefits for equal lengths of service.

I shall illustrate the difficulty which has arisen from the way in which the Bill implements the directive. If a man and a woman join a company at the age of 25 and retire at the age of 55 after 30 years service and both have a final salary of £15,000 a year, under the terms of the company scheme both would be entitled to an ultimate pension of £7,650 a year, made up of £5,383 from the company scheme and £2,267 from the state retirement pension. However, retiring at the age of 55, neither would qualify for state retirement pension, so it is company practice to pay a supplement of an amount equivalent to the state retirement pension to its pensioners until they reach state retirement age. That means that a woman would receive that payment for five years until she reached the age of

[Mr. Watts]

sixty and a man would receive that payment for 10 years until he reached the age of 65 and was able to claim the state retirement pension.

As I understand it, the way in which the Bill enacts the directive would make such payments to the man between the ages of 60 and 65 unlawful because the woman would no longer be receiving that supplement as she would be in receipt of the state retirement pension. That has considerable consequences, and there are only two ways in which companies operating integrated schemes with common retirement ages would be able to comply with the law. They could remove the supplementary payments paid before state retirement age, but that would be a grave disincentive to people taking early retirement, and the effects on someone whose pension was based on a relatively low salary would be quite catastrophic.

If someone had a finishing salary of £8,000 a year, more than half the total benefit would be removed until they reached state retirement pension age. Alternatively, these schemes could continue to pay the supplement, but they would have to pay it to women between the ages of 60 and 65 so that women retiring after the same length of service and on the same salary would receive a total pension income of £2,267 a year more than their male colleagues. That is no equal treatment, and it cannot be what was in the minds of those in Brussels who drafted the directive.

This has been a matter of correspondence both between myself and my right hon. Friend and hon. Friends in the Department and between the company and officials. The company has taken opinion fom a very learned counsel and, equally, the Department has consulted its own lawyers. The lawyers have come to different interpretations of the directive and how it should be implemented. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and hon. Friends in the Department for the diligence they have shown in considering the matter.

I am not a lawyer, so I do not have to form my own view about which legal advice is correct. But even if I concede that the advice the Department has obtained from its lawyers is correct on this occasion, I still urge my hon. Friend to accept the amendment because the consequences I have described amount to a ridiculous piece of Euro-nonsense. If those consequences are what the Eurocrats in Brussels intended, the Government should be prepared to accept the amendment to ensure continuing true equality of treatment and should be prepared to be taken to the European Court by the unelected bunch of bureaucrats sitting on the other side of the English channel.

If we were to be forced to change our law to allow that absurd circumstance to apply, there would be outrage in the House and the country. It would highlight the way in which the powers of Brussels have encroached on the prerogatives of the House and in this case, as in many others, on basic common sense. I urge my hon. Friend to accept the amendment and, if necessary, to have the courage to accept the consequences of the big stick being wagged from Brussels.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I appreciate that the issue my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) has raised is of great importance for Mars, the leading employer in his constituency, and for his constituents who work there, and I congratulate him on the clarity with which he explained the problem that now confronts not merely Mars but other companies that run integrated pension schemes.

The particular point raised by the amendment concerns the application of the equal treatment requirements in schedule 4 to the Bill to integrated occupational pension schemes. Ironically, those schemes have already gone a considerable way towards the adoption of equal treatment for men and women, and I applaud them for that. They have introduced at 60 a common pension age for both men and women for pensions payable under the scheme. However, in calculating the benefits payable, they treat men and women differently between their 60th and 65th birthdays. Men are paid what is known as a bridging pension to compensate for the fact that, unlike women, they are not entitled to state retirement pension for that period, as my hon. Friend has explained.

The amendment seeks to ensure that schemes such as the Mars scheme will be able to continue to pay bridging pensions to men between 60 and 65 after January 1993, when the schedule comes into effect, but will also be able to restrict the amount of any bridging pension to the current rate of basic state retirement pension. I am sympathetic to my hon. Friend, as he knows, and to those schemes which would stand to benefit from his amendment, but I cannot, I am afraid, recommend to the House that it be incorporated in the Bill, and at the end of my speech I shall be inviting my hon. Friend to withdraw it.

I shall not give all the arguments and background to the position, as the hour is late, but I shall write to my hon. Friend again because he deserves the fullest explanation, as do his constituents and Mars, which has taken a leading part in arguing on his side of the case. I will explain that, subject to certain specified exceptions, the directive requires the adoption of the principle of equal treatment, which means that there can be no discrimination on the basis of sex, either directly or indirectly, in the provisions of occupational pension schemes, and it refers specifically to three areas. These are, first, the scope of the schemes and conditions of access, secondly, the obligation to contribute and the calculation of contributions and thirdly, the calculation of benefits and the conditions governing the duration and retention of entitlement to them.

Paragraph 2(4)(d) of schedule 4, introduced in Committee, already makes use of the permitted derogation to permit schemes to continue to provide different ages at which pensions come into payment to men and women. This is, of course, of no benefit to the schemes which my hon. Friend's amendment would assist. They already have an equal pension age for men and women. The exception applies to pensionable ages for the granting of pensions.

We do not believe that the payment of a higher pension to a man for five years from age 60 comes within the definition of the exception, nor, if a bridging pension is taken to be an arrangement separate from other pensions payable under the scheme to both men and women, can it escape from being a benefit restricted to a single sex.

As my hon. Friend suggested, it would certainly have been easier for the Government to adopt a wider interpretation of the directive, but to do so would have been neither wise nor in the long-term interest of the schemes.

We are unwilling to lay ourselves open to proceedings in Luxembourg that we have failed to comply with the treaty of Rome if we are sure that we are bound to lose. Equally, we would like to protect schemes from proceedings instituted, as it is likely they would be, either by the Commission or by women between 60 and 65, who would rightly submit that they were being treated by their scheme less favourably than men because their scheme had calculated and was paying them a pension on a basis inferior to those of their male colleagues.

I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend's argument and with the situation in which Mars and similar pensions schemes find themselves. I can assure him, however, that we have looked long and hard at the exact wording of the exception and it is with regret that we have concluded that bridging pensions in integrated schemes are beyond the scope of the derogation.

To adopt my hon. Friend's amendment would have the United Kingdom in breach of its obligations under the treaty and leave both the Government and individual schemes vulnerable to an unfavourable judgment by the European Court. Although I am sorry to have to ask my hon. Friend, I hope that he will feel able to withdraw his amendment now.

Mr. Tony Banks: Don't. Die first.

Mr. Watts: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the tone of his reply, but not entirely for its content. I realise that he would make both himself and me rather unpopular with hon. Members of all parties if he had replied to me at much greater length. I should be grateful—as I am sure the House would be—and would find it helpful if my hon. Friend replied at greater length in writing as he has offered to do, and if he would place that reply in the Library of the House so that every hon. Member can see the facts of the Government's position.

In view of the conciliatory tone of my hon. Friend's reply, despite its disappointing content, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave withdrawn.

Amendments made:

No. 56, in page 42, line 25 leave out 'relevant' and insert 'service-related'.

No. 57, in page 42, line 28 leave out 'relevant' and insert 'service-related'.

No. 58, in page 45, line 29 leave out 'relevant' and insert 'service-related'.

No. 59, in page 45, line 35 leave out 'an exempt' and insert 'a limited'.

No. 60, in page 45, line 36 leave out '"exempt' and insert '"limited'

No. 61, in page 45, line 48 leave out '"relevant' and insert '"service-related'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Schedule 6

PRE-CONSOLIDATION AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 54, line 7, leave out 'For section 4(3) of the principal Act' and insert—

'(1) In section 4 of the principal Act, for subsection (3)'.

No. 9, in page 54, line 16, at end insert—

'(2) In subsection (6C) of that section (amount of secondary Class 1 contribution) for the words "the amount of a secondary Class 1 contribution" there shall be substituted the words "where a secondary Class 1 contribution is payable, the amount of that contribution".'.

No. 35, in page 55, line 18, at end insert—

'16A. In sub-paragraph (5) of paragraph 2 of Schedule 12 to that Act (constitution of medical appeal tribunals) for the words "to the panel mentioned in sub-paragraph (4)" there shall be substituted the words "chairman of a tribunal under sub-paragraph (4)(e)".'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Clause 25

REGULATIONS AND ORDERS: GENERAL PROVISIONS

Amendments made: No. 7, in page 20, line 26, after 'sections', insert

'*(Amendments relating to primary Class 1 contributions)*.'.

No. 37, in page 20, line 26, after 'sections', insert

'*(Abolition of earnings rule etc)*'.

No. 52, in page 20, line 26, after '3', insert

'*(Benefits for women widowed before 11th April 1988)*'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Clause 26

REGULATIONS AND ORDERS: GENERAL PROVISIONS

Amendment made: No. 38, in page 21, line 15, at end insert—

'(dd) the first regulations made under section 59B(7) of the principal Act (retirement allowance) by virtue of paragraph 8(6) of Schedule *(Abolition of earnings rule etc)* to this Act, or

(de) the first regulations made under section 2 of the Social Security Act 1988 (reduced earnings allowance etc) by virtue of paragraph 8(7) of that Schedule, or'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Clause 27

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: No. 53, in page 21, line 45 at end insert—

'"Commissioner" has the same meaning as it has in the principal Act;'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Clause 30

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendments made: No. 54, in page 22, line 40 after '3' insert

'*(Benefits for women widowed before 11th April 1988)*'.

No. 81, in page 22, line 40, leave out '13, 14, 15' and insert 'to'.

No. 82, in page 22, line 41, at end insert—

'(aa) Schedule 1;'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Schedule 7

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 39, in page 59, line 9, leave out from beginning to first 'A' in line 13 and insert

'for the words following paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words—

"and, subject to the provisions of this Act, he shall become so entitled on the day on which he attains pensionable age and his entitlement shall continue throughout his life."

(3A) After that subsection there shall be inserted—

"(1A)".

No. 40, in page 59, leave out lines 19 and 20 and insert—

'(9) Subject to the provisions of this Act, a woman's entitlement to a Category B retirement pension shall commence on the day on which the conditions of entitlement become satisfied in her case and shall continue throughout her life.'.

No. 41, in page 59, line 34, leave out paragraph 5.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Schedule 8

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 10, in page 67, line 16, column 3, at end insert—

'In section 4(6F), the words "primary or".'.

No. 42, in page 67, line 19, column 3, at end insert—

'In section 14(6), the words following paragraph (c).
In section 15(6)(a), the words "but have not retired from regular employment".'.

No. 43, in page 67, column 3, leave out lines 22 and 23 and insert—

'Section 27(3), (4) and (5).
In section 28(1)(a), the words "and has retired from regular employment".
Section 29(5)(a).
In section 30, subsection (1), in subsection (3), in paragraph (a), the words "retired from regular employment or has otherwise" and the words "retired or" and subsection (6)(a).'.

No. 47, in page 68, line 10, column 3, at end insert—

'In Schedule 4, paragraph 39(a).'.

No. 48, in page 68, line 29, column 3, at end insert—

'In Schedule 4, paragraph 11.'.

No. 21, in page 68, line 35, column 3, at end insert—

In section 41(1), the words "section 30(1) of this Act and to".

Section 48(2) and (3).'.

No. 45, in page 67, line 50, column 3, at end insert—'and "30(1)".'.

No. 46, in page 67, line 51, column 3, at beginning insert—

'In section 8(1), the words "who has retired from regular employment".
Section 11.'.

No. 49, in page 68, line 39, column 3, at end insert—'Section 63(1)(a)(ii).'.

No. 50, in page 68, line 46, column 3, leave out 'paragraph 3(3)(c)' and insert—

'in paragraph 3, in subparagraph (3)(b), the words "30(1)", subparagraph (3)(c), subparagraph (3)(c), subparagraph (4)(b) and the word "or" immediately preceding it.'.

No. 51, in page 68, line 51, at end insert—

'1988 c. 7. Social Security Act 1988. Section 2(9).'—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

10.16 pm

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This is a relatively short Bill but it covers a great deal of ground and brings in some welcome and necessary changes—changes improved and extended by Government amendments and those brought forward by Opposition Members which the Government have been persuaded to adopt—not often enough, I am sure the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs Beckett) will tell us shortly for the full satisfaction of Labour Members, but often enough, I hope, for hon. Members on both sides to feel that the time spent in Committee was worthwhile.

The Bill will reform the structure of national insurance contributions, removing the steps that were a heavy disincentive for employees to increase the hours they worked over the lower earnings limit, and giving a saving for nearly all class 1 contributors of up to £3 a week.

The Bill will also abolish the earnings rule, removing the restriction on people enjoying their pensions while contributing to the economy and their own incomes. About 2,500 workers over pension age will be affected immediately, but it is over the coming years that the full impact will be felt, as those coming up to 60 or 65 will no longer have to decide whether to make the declaration that they are giving up work to secure their pension, thereby in effect writing themselves out of the job market.

The Bill also applies equal treatment in occupational pensions—no discrimination between men and women as regards the right to join a scheme, liability or entitlement

to pay contributions, rate of contributions or, as we discussed when debating the last amendment, entitlement to benefits.

Particularly welcome, I believe, is the clause raising the upper age limit for mobility allowance from 75 to 80. The Bill will also put liability for injury—again, as we have debated tonight—on a reasonable and equitable footing, with the insurer obliged to reimburse the state for the cost of the plaintiff's benefits while he was off sick as well as the plaintiff for the injury itself.

The Bill also introduces the new concept of employment trial for those who have been out of work for more than six months as an encouragement to broaden the range of jobs that they feel able to consider. But the central feature of the Bill is the change that we have debated extensively today—the requirement that in future every unemployed person, as a condition of receiving benefit, should be actively seeking work.

Most unemployed people do this on their own initiative —because they want to get back into a job—but a minority do not, as some Opposition Members have conceded. But, they say, the present rules are strong enough to deal with that minority. My hon. Friend the Minister of State showed conclusively that that comfortable assumption is wrong. The current rules are sufficient to ensure that people are available for work and have drawn attention to that fact by signing on, but not to do any more.

That is unfair to those in work, many of whom are not well off, who pay the taxes and contributions which finance unemployment benefits. It is unfair also to those who are without work but who are assiduously seeking it. It is unfair in the long run to the individuals themselves and their families, and it is unfair to the nation at large when there are growing numbers of unfilled vacancies.

Opposition Members will say that the unemployed will be pressed into a mechanical, useless and soul-destroying round of chasing after jobs that are not there or are unattainable. Emphatically that is not so. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State made absolutely clear, the purpose is to provide encouragement, incentive and, indeed, where necessary in some cases, pressure on those without jobs to do what the majority of unemployed people already do willingly and on their own initiative.

Local staff will be required to know the local job market and to judge what is realistic, fair and reasonable for an individual in terms of his or her age, health and experience.

Mr. Battle: Will the Minister confirm that the Bill will also price people into work by insisting that unemployed people accept a job at whatever low rate they are offered, regardless of whether they can live on it or not?

Mr. Lloyd: The going rate will no longer be a reason for people to refuse work, but, of course, it will be one of the many considerations that benefit officers will take into account, as my hon. Friend made clear.

The "actively seeking work" change is fully justified in simple justice. There is no better time to make it than now, when there is an increasing range of jobs to be had and the most severe constraint on the nation's further economic growth is that so many of them remain empty. I urge the House to give this excellent Bill a Third Reading.

10.20 pm

Mrs. Beckett: The main impact of this year's Social Security Bill will stem—and is intended to stem, as the Minister accepted in his final remarks—from clauses 7, 8, 9 and 10. Those clauses have been explained—I will not use the word "justified"—by the Government on the basis of their reaction, in the main, to a survey of the London labour market which they argue is supported by other labour market surveys, although many who are familiar with the detail of all those reports would contest that view.

One could argue in any event that the London labour market is not typical, but let us not worry about that, because the Government did not. We acknowledge that it was reported in that survey that some unemployed people in London had not looked for work in the previous week and that some has not looked for work in the previous four weeks. On that one feature of that one report the central part of the legislation seems to have been based. All the other aspects of the report, all the questions that it left unanswered and all the myths that it laid have been completely ignored.

Let us begin by taking those who said that they had not looked for work in the previous week or weeks. They were not asked in that survey, as they had been in others, why they had not looked for work at that time. When the Secretary of State referred at the Tory party conference to the number who seemed to be in that position, he failed to mention—no doubt through an oversight—that about 250,000 were sick or disabled. Even those who do not come into that category have indicated in other surveys that if they had ceased looking for work every week, it was due to a realistic assessment, based on immediate and direct experience, of their chances of getting a job in the current labour market conditions.

The Government have suggested, as did the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State a moment ago, that because labour market conditions have eased the provisions of the Bill are needed to ensure that those who have despaired and, because of their experience, have ceased to seek work are put in touch with the eased market. Other labour market surveys show that people who at one time ceased actively to pursue work every week step up their job search of their own volition as soon as it becomes apparent that more jobs may be available. That evidence supports the view that clause 7 is not needed to encourage an active search for work where there is any point in that search for the individual.

The survey on which the legislation is based showed that employers are reluctant to hire the long-term unemployed even when they have suitable skills or experience. Nothing is being done about that in the legislation. The survey also showed that unemployed people do not have unrealistic expectations of levels of pay and that they are not ruling themselves out because they are seeking wages which employers cannot or are not prepared to offer. Yet clause 9 is based on the assumption that that is happening.

Labour market surveys show, not surprisingly, that those with family responsibilities look harder for work than those without them. Yet under clause 10 people with family responsibilities will see all rights to any income, even income support, placed in jeopardy in order, so the Government say, to encourage them to look harder for

[Mrs. Beckett]

work, although the survey on which the legislation is based shows that they do not need encouragement when work is available.

What this survey and every survey of the labour market shows most of all is that by no stretch of statistical creativity can the Government make the number of jobs without workers fit the number of workers without jobs. On even the most favourable reading of the unemployment figures, two out of three—or, more likely, five out of six—have no opportunity of employment, no matter how hard they seek it. Under the Bill, they will be put under pressure to give assurances that they will take any job with any wages and conditions, even if it is temporary work, or they will be disqualified from receiving benefit. The Minister has said that that will not happen. That is what the Government said last year when we warned them that taking all rights to benefit away from the 16 to 18-year-olds would result in many of them wandering destitute through our streets. Since then, Ministers have had to take emergency action to deal with some of the problems that they said last year would not exist.

The Bill will do nothing to help most of the unemployed to find work. Far from encouraging those with problems, it will discourage those who continue not to find work by rubbing their noses in their repeated failure week after week, year in and year out.

The Bill is intended to reduce further the numbers of registered unemployed. It is intended to foster the climate in which people are forced into jobs even with atrocious pay and conditions. It will cause hardship, distress, agony and anguish to many who, despite deprivation, seek to maintain their pride and their independence of spirit. I fear that it will lead to increased mental breakdown and even to an increase in the number of suicides. That seems to us a high price to pay and a serious risk to run for the sake of pandering to the prejudices of the comfortable, the secure and the ignorant. It is a price that no responsible Government would be prepared to pay and a risk that no responsible Government would be willing to run, and it will be a lasting shame even to the present irresponsible Administration.

10.28 pm

Mr. Burns: I do not intend to speak for long, but I should like to make three points.

During the controversy over the most contentious part of the Bill, clause 5, which has been welcomed on both sides of the House, has been overlooked. The clause implements my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's decision to increase to 80 years the age limit for mobility allowance.

Secondly, the changes to the rules on income support and housing benefit for those 16 and 17-year-olds who are genuinely estranged from their parents are right and should be welcomed by everyone.

Thirdly, on the more controversial topic of the "actively seeking work" clause, I accept that there is a strong difference of opinion between the two sides of the House. I believe that when the clause is in practice it will not bring about the dire results mentioned by Opposition Members. The vast majority of those who, sadly, are unemployed and desperately want to go back to work will have nothing to fear from that part of the Bill. It will help to fill the loophole open to people who genuinely do not want to work.

I am pleased that we have come to the Third Reading of the Bill. I wholeheartedly support it and look forward to seeing it on the statute book later this summer.

10.29 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: I find it somewhat sickening that a number of Conservative Members have suddenly turned up in the Chamber after not having been here this evening. They have come, no doubt, from their good dinners further to penalise the poor and the vulnerable. There is something especially nasty about the way that this has been done. Conservative Members would not be prepared to accept the conditions that they impose on other people. They would not be prepared to accept the sort of strictures that attack the poor and the vulnerable which are delivered across the Chamber.

The Government have deliberately created mass unemployment as a policy. They have created mass unemployment as a way of trying to break the powers of the trade union movement and of forcing wages down. The Government have continually attacked forms of employment protection which were fought for before they reached the statute book. The Government have attacked the unemployed. They have created unemployment and they have attacked the people they have forced on the dole.

The Bill is vindictive. It is part of the Government's strategy to force wages down. We know what Victorian values mean to this Government. I am sure that some Conservative Members would be quite happy to see little boys once again earning pennies by going up chimneys. Through the Bill the Government are trying to compel people to take low-paid work—not the kind of work that Conservative Members would be prepared to do.

We have the most obscene values in this society. Some of the most useless people—and I include some Conservative Members in that—receive the highest wages in society. If I were run over tonight—if I were, it would probably be by a car driven by a Conservative Member—who would I want to come to my assistance? Would I want 100 stockbrokers or a nurse? That question is rhetorical and I know who I would want to assist me. However, we must bear in mind the amount of money a stockbroker earns in comparison to a nurse's salary.

Mr. Winnick: With regard to the Victorian society, has my hon. Friend seen today's television news and reports in the press relating to the first survey in 100 years of people living and sleeping in derelict areas? As many people are sleeping out in the cold only a few minutes walk from this place as there were 100 years ago. Is that not another way in which we are returning to the values of Victorian Britain?

Mr. Banks: It is very interesting that the Salvation Army carried out that survey into homelessness in London. The Government have stopped keeping statistics on that subject. When the Government are confronted with the nasty realities of the consequences of their policies, what do they do? They ensure that no one collects the relevant statistics and say that the problem does not exist. It is not surprising that homelessness and poverty have doubled under this Government. It is part of the Government's strategy to attack the weakest, most

vulnerable and those suffering most as a result of the Government's policies—*[Interruption.]* I know that Conservative Members cannot wait to get into their cars and taxis to leave this place. However, I will not facilitate their easy egress from the House. The way in which Conservative Members were not in the Chamber during the Report stage, how they did not listen and are not concerned is sickening. They are just waiting for the end of Third Reading so they can clear off. I will not facilitate them.

It is evidence of the Tory Government's hypocrisy that they always claim that the rich need the incentive of more money to work, but the poor need less. *[Interruption.]* I assume that Conservative Members have had the benefit of some very good dinners tonight——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I would be obliged if the hon. Gentleman would get on with his speech.

Mr. Banks: It is difficult. I would get on with my speech, but is obvious to me that I am faced by a rather unruly and hostile mob. Conservative Members are making it difficult for me to get on with my speech. A little earlier I heard a Tory Whip complain most bitterly that a Division on the Bill had spoilt his dinner. Jolly good. I am glad that it spoilt his dinner.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not relevant.

Mr. Banks: Indeed it is not, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, my point is that all the Conservative Members want to do is to get on with their dinners, get into their taxis and get home. They do not give a damn about the people whom they have affected by the Bill.

The Bill is hypocritical and vicious and it is just like Tory Members. It is a snapshot of Tory Members. It is typical of this Gradgrind Government and the hon. Members who support them. I shall oppose the Bill in the Lobby.

10.35 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Having speeded up a speech a few weeks ago so that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) could make his speech and then have his dinner, I regret his remarks about dinners.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will forgive me if I pay tribute to the role played by my hon. Friend the Minister of State in getting the Bill through a toughly argued but civilised Committee stage. That role has continued since the Bill left Committee. I cite as an example the response to the points made about 16 to 17-year-olds and the handsome tribute which was paid to my hon. Friend by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on Monday, which appears in *Hansard* at column 751. My hon. Friend the Minister also acknowledged this evening that the regulations in the Bill will take account of work-related expenses, which is helpful.

I say this in the context of the bilious attack made earlier this evening by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). We learned nothing new from that attack about the Minister or, indeed, the hon. Member for Bradford, South.

There have been several changes to the Bill since it left Committee. Those changes, which have been referred to this evening, have considerably improved the Bill. For example, the Bill implements the Budget cuts in employees' national insurance contributions. Many Conservative Members have been pressing for that for some time. Reference has also been made to the abolition of the earnings limit. Other improvements include improvements in widows' pensions for the 40 to 45-year-old group and the new premiums for pensioners aged 75 and over.

The most emotional debate in Committee was that on the 16 to 17-year-olds, and the Government have responded to that. The most emotional debate on Report was not that on child benefit. I welcome the fact that the Government are committed to extend the take-up of family credit. I and others believe that this is essential to meet the criticisms which have been levelled by Conservative Members towards the Government's policy on child benefit. In an oral question a week last Monday, I welcomed the measures being taken by the Government.

The most emotional debate on Report was that on transitional benefits, which I do not intend to discuss further. I simply quote again the pledge made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary:

> "We shall continue to consider the information available to us, and where it is evident that there is pressure on a particular group we shall act accordingly."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 1989; Vol. 151, c. 743.]

I welcome that commitment by my hon. Friend and I welcome the Bill and the various measures and improvements that it makes.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 165.

Division No. 181] **[10.37 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas

Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Ingram, Adam
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Planning Consents (Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

10.53 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): This is the first Adjournment debate in which I have spoken, and if someone had predicted that it would be a debate concentrating on Wales, or, more accurately, on a particular part of Wales—the district authority area of Anglesey—that would have been difficult to believe.

I raise this issue on behalf of a constituent who wrote to me on 14 April. Tragically, two days later that gentleman died. However, I decided to go ahead, and, in a sense, this debate is in his memory. In his letter to me he said that he had written to a builder in north Wales asking for information about a building development—17 properties—taking place in the community of Collen Wen, Llanfairpwll, Anglesey. I shall read the letter that my constituent received from the builder:

"Dear Mr. Lovell,

Thank you for your letter dated 6th April, the contents of which are noted. We have pleasure in enclosing details of our development at Collen Wen but should warn you at this stage that unless you are moving to Anglesey with your work, or you are retiring to the area having been born there, we would be unable to sell a property to you on that development. A condition of our planning consent was that we sold new homes only to existing residents of Gwynedd or those with relatives in the area, or those born in the area and returning to retire. If we can provide any further information please do not hesitate to contact us."

Under the notice of decision within the section 52 planning agreement drawn up between the authority and the builder, the restraints imposed are even worse than the builder first thought. Paragraph 9 of that agreement states:

"The dwellings hereby approved shall only be occupied by a person currently residing or employed within the county of Gwynedd, including any dependants of such a person residing with him, or a widow or widower of such a person."

My constituent, who fought for the United Kingdom in Malaya and Burma during the second world war, made the point that he always felt that he had been fighting for a free country—for a country in which there is freedom of movement, and in which a person has a right to buy a house in one part of the country, or sell one, move, and then buy a house in another part of that country. I am talking not about a wealthy man who is looking for a second home, but about a man who worked hard all his life in an industrial area—in south Essex—and who, on nearing the end of his working life, decided that he wanted to retire to a part of the United Kingdom that he liked, and where he wished to spend the last years of his life.

Although I accept that there is considerable concern in different parts of the United Kingdom—not just in Wales—that local people are not priced out of their local housing market, there are far more subtle ways of ensuring that that is achieved than by resorting to the blunderbuss used by Anglesey council. Although the provision of housing for local people is important, it is also important to remember the right of any United Kingdom citizen to live in any part of the United Kingdom.

Since receiving my constituent's letter, I have contacted the builder, who is the piggy in the middle of this sad affair. The builder is currently taking legal advice from the House Builders Federation, which I hope will be that the council acted unlawfully.

Given that the caveats in question are contained within a section 52 agreement, they apply in perpetuity. However, the policy that they seek to pursue does not work in practice. Not so long ago, the builder had sold eight of the 17 properties on the development—presumably to local people who met the caveats specified in the section 52 agreement. However, seven of those eight purchasers, on learning that they themselves could only resell the properties to others who satisfied the council's caveats, cancelled their purchases. So the builder, because of the council's unreasonable attitude, is finding it difficult to sell the properties that it built.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Has the hon. Gentleman had the courtesy to contact Ynys Môn borough council about that matter? If he has, was he informed that there are 28,088 houses on the island, of which fewer than 200 are subject to any restriction of the type to which he refers, leaving any of the 99 per cent. of the remaining properties that may be on the market at any one time free to be purchased by his constituent?

Secondly, is the hon. Gentleman aware that the island has three designated growth areas on which there are no planning restrictions? They are at Amlwch, Holyhead and Llangefni. Thirdly, does he know, as a result of his consultation with the borough council, that these restrictions do not apply to a person who moves to the island as a result of employment? Fourthly, is he aware that the planning consent to which he refers has not yet been completed?

Mr. Janman: On the last point, there seems to be some confusion or lack of communication between the building company—which is taking legal advice from the House Builders Federation about the sort of nonsense that this council is pursuing—and the council. I have not spoken to the council, because of what it has laid out clearly in section 52 of the agreement, of which I have a copy. I remind the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) of what I have said. A person living in my constituency, or a person living in Caernarfon, Swansea, Fishguard or Cardiff, has the right to choose to live anywhere in the United Kingdom. By "anywhere", I mean any specific house, road, village or town in the country. This is not an English—Welsh issue. The sort of constraints put down clearly by this local authority impede the right of a citizen of the United Kingdom to choose to buy a certain residence in which he or she, as a resident of this country, wishes to live.

It is interesting that, since I did an interview on HTV television on Monday night, I have already had a letter of support for what I am saying from two residents of the county of Gwynedd. They fully agree with what I have been saying. The sales director of the company concerned has lived in Wales for 22 years. She has a Welsh-speaking son, yet she, for example, would not be permitted, under this section 52 agreement, to buy one of the properties that her own building company has built at this development.

It is not in the interests of the House for me to be over-dramatic about this affair. I emphasise that, perhaps unlike my constituent, who understandably got slightly the wrong end of the stick about what was happening, I do not see this as an English versus Welsh issue. We should not take a course whereby local authorities are legally able to put up an obstacle—in this case an Anglesey wall—against people coming into an area and being able to buy the

house they wish. Such a situation could get out of control. Certain communities could react against what they saw other communities doing. The result could be a silly and dire situation.

I have used the opportunity tonight to bring this series of events to the attention of my hon. Friend. He can see that this situation caused a great deal of heartache to one of my constituents. It is tragic that, only two days after writing to me, he died suddenly. I hope that my hon. Friend will consider the ramifications of this case. I hope he will tell the House tonight that the Government will not support local authorities putting such tight restraints on housing developments.

Many housing developments are taking place in my constituency. The local authority provides for low-cost housing through the use of housing associations buying a percentage of properties in any one development. What has happened in this affair gave a bad impression to one of my constituents. I hope that the situation can be reviewed. If possible, I hope that regulations can be issued by the Welsh Office and used to ensure that local authorities cannot use section 52 agreements in this way.

11.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. It gives me an opportunity to clear the air on a matter about which there has been some confusion. Before I begin, may I express my condolences to the family of his constituent who raised this matter with him and who, as he said, died recently.

My hon. Friend will understand that responsibility for local development control rests with the local planning authorities. In this instance the planning authority is the Isle of Anglesey borough council, and the case is still in its hands. As I understand it, a formal decision on the application for planning permission to build houses at Collen Wen, Llanfairpwll, has not yet been announced, although the applicant has been given a clear indication that permission will be available subject to certain conditions.

Mr. Janman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Grist: Not at this point.

As there is a right of appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State against either a refusal of planning permission—although that seems not to be likely here—or conditions imposed on such a permission, it would not be right for me to make any detailed observations on this case, or indeed on any other particular case in Anglesey or north Wales. I can, however, attempt to clarify our policy on the use of conditions in planning permissions in a general sense, in the hope of putting my hon. Friend's mind at rest.

Jointly with the Department of the Environment, the Welsh Office issued a circular on the subject in 1985. This circular, 1/85 "The Use of Conditions in Planning Permission", makes it very clear that conditions should be imposed only where necessary and where reasonable. They must also be enforceable, precise and relevant both to planning and to the development to be permitted. The circular makes specific reference to the use of conditions to secure particular types of domestic occupancy, and puts very cogently the reasons why the practice should, except in exceptional circumstances, be avoided.

Paragraph 77 of the annex to the circular states:

"if the development of a site for housing is an acceptable use of the land there will seldom be any good reason on land use planning grounds to restrict the occupancy of those houses to a particular type of person e.g. those already living or working in the area, or holidaymakers. To impose such a condition is to draw an artificial and unwarranted distinction between new houses or new conversions and existing houses that are not subject to such restrictions on occupancy or sale. It may deter house builders from providing homes for which there is local demand and building societies from providing mortgage finance. It may also impose hardship on owners who subsequently need to sell. It involves too detailed and onerous an application of development control and too great an interference in the rights of individual ownership. In the view of the Secretaries of State, such conditions should therefore not be imposed save in the most exceptional cases where there are clear and specific circumstances that warrant allowing an individual house or extension on a site where development would not normally be permitted."

In other words, in Wales—as in England—a planning authority must, if challenged, be prepared to demonstrate land use issues to justify an occupancy condition. The most usual of those exceptional issues, as I am sure my hon. Friend knows, is that which relates to the occupancy of dwellings erected for farmers and farm workers. Otherwise occupancy conditions are very much the exception rather than the rule. That is not to say, however, that it is never appropriate for local planning authorities to consider, and even give priority to, specific needs which they may have identified in their areas. Whereas it will never be right for the statutory planning system to be used to discriminate against any particular groups in the community, it can be used to respond sensitively to particular needs.

There are ways within the planning system in which such problems can be settled without the use of planning conditions, and it may be helpful if I touch on one of them. Although most planning policy and practice is common to both England and Wales—with varying degrees of emphasis, of course—at least one issue arises in Wales alone. My hon. Friend may be aware of concerns that have been expressed about the future of the Welsh language —particularly in areas such as Anglesey where a majority of the population speaks Welsh, but where a number of social and demographic factors have resulted in a decline in the language over the past decades. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken a number of positive steps to help the language. They include the issue in December last year of a circular clarifying the position of Welsh in relation to development plans and development control.

The circular explains that land use policies in structure and local plans can take into account, in appropriate circumstances, the implications of planning policies for the Welsh language. For development control decisions, the circular reminds planning authorities that when an application is made to them for planning permission they must have regard to the provisions of the development plan—as far as is material to the application—and to any other material considerations. The circular goes on to say that policies that relate to the needs of and interests of the Welsh language may properly be among those considerations, and makes it clear that that requirement bears equally on the Secretary of State and his inspectors in considering planning appeals.

Decisions in individual cases where the needs and interests of the Welsh language may be a material consideration, whether that consideration flows from

[Mr. Grist]

policies in the development plan or elsewhere, must, as with all other planning applications, be based on planning grounds only and must be reasonable. While it has been held that material considerations can cover a wide field, they must be genuine planning considerations—that is, they must be related to the purpose of planning legislation, which is to regulate the development and use of land. In determining planning applications where the language is an issue, the Secretary of State and his inspectors expect local planning authorities to produce specific evidence of the land use planning considerations which have led to their decision.

My hon. Friend will note that the advice emphasises the need for planning decisions to be based on planning grounds only and to be reasonable. Local planning authorities in Wales will be aware that no encouragement is given by this advice for the use of planning conditions which we do not see as an appropriate mechanism for implementing local policies formulated under this advice.

The power to impose conditions on a planning permission can enable many development proposals to proceed where it would otherwise be necessary to refuse planning permission. Sensitive use of conditions can improve the quality of development control and enhance public confidence in the planning system. In considering whether a particular condition is necessary, one key test is whether planning permission would have to be refused if the condition were not to be imposed. If not, such a condition needs special and precise justification. The same criteria and tests are applied by my right hon. Friend and his inspectors in deciding whether a condition appealed against should be retained.

I need not remind my hon. Friend that the purpose of the planning system is to regulate the development and use of land in the public interest. Whether a proposal would affect the locality generally and unacceptably may be a legitimate public interest, and the planning authority may indeed feel that it has to protect it. At the end of the day, however, its powers under the planning Act are concerned with land use planning matters and it is to these that it must relate its decision whether to approve or to refuse or to apply conditions.

We are currently looking in Wales at ways in which some of the problems associated with the provision of low-cost housing for people living in rural areas can be tackled, and in particular whether the planning system has anything to offer.

I announced at this morning's sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee that I shall be seeking discussions between the Welsh Office and the relevant local authorities to examine this area of rural housing. It will be my intention, however, that any answers which we may find should be within clear planning guidelines, should be seen as fair as between different groups, and that any steps taken should result in real benefit to those in housing need. This is not of course an issue unique to Wales, and my hon. Friend will be aware of the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in this regard. But in Wales we have our national and cultural setting to take account of and the discussions which we are putting in hand will be against that background as well.

It is clear that one of the options that we shall be exploring will concern itself with how the planning system might help both to provide affordable housing in rural areas and to ensure that houses thus provided remain available for that purpose despite changes of occupancy that may perforce have to take place. I shall, of course, have in mind my hon. Friend's strictures about occupancy conditions when we come to consider the results of these discussions in Wales.

Mr. Janman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Grist: I do not think that it would be suitable for me to do so at this moment.

Whether the planning policies in question deal with the Welsh language or any other issue, they are best expressed in an up-to-date and relevant development plan. Authorities should recognise that policies in approved development plans carry much more weight in places of dispute than informal policies expressed elsewhere, possibly without having been publicly aired.

Late last year my right hon. Friend, jointly with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, published a planning policy guidance note on local plans. In that they urged the importance of local plans as the basis for sound and effective development control, especially in areas where there is much pressure for development—and that, as my hon. Friend will appreciate, often includes pleasant rural areas to which people wish to retire.

Some authorities still make a practice of using as a basis for control of development informal or bottom-drawer plans which have not been subject to the statutory procedures of public consultation and formal adoption. Others have chosen to do without any form of land use plan and have sought to deal with planning applications ad hoc as they come forward. Neither approach is a satisfactory alternative to the prescription and adoption of the statutory local plan. Informal plans carry less weight for development control purposes and provide less satisfactory guidance to developers and reassurance to local people about the future pattern of development than a properly prepared and adopted local plan. If there is no adopted local plan, local authorities can find it more difficult to justify refusing planning permission or to justify planning conditions and to support their reasons on appeal.

My hon. Friend will no doubt know that the Government plan changes to the development plan system. The district development plan—in effect a local plan for a whole district—will form the central feature of the new system. As that is the level at which the vast majority of planning applications are dealt with, district councils will be made responsible for preparing a comprehensive plan for the whole of their local authority area, setting out planning policies for land use which are to be applied in dealing with planning applications. That plan will, of course, have to be consistent with national and county policies and with any regional planning guidelines that may be issued in Wales. The aim is to obtain a single development plan, which every authority will be obliged to prepare within a given time scale. That will form a working tool to guide the district authority, the developer and the public alike. Legislation will be introduced to bring about those changes. But pending that, it is important that the preparation of local plans should move ahead briskly. The work done will not be lost

in any new system of development plan since provision will be made to enable up-to-date local plans to be carried over into the new system.

The issue that my hon. Friend raised was about planning conditions and I hope that what I have said has, at least, made clear to him the Government's policy towards particular kinds of conditions in Wales and about the context in which planning policies in the Principality are set. At the end of the day, it is for the respective developer to decide whether to challenge a local decision by appealing to the Secretary of State. I am satisfied that the issues that have arisen during this debate are well understood by developers and planning authorities alike and that the Government's view on the use of planning conditions, by and large, is accepted.

The Government remain of the view that the present planning system provides the best mechanism available to use for securing the right balance between achieving much needed development and conserving the best in our natural and man-made environments. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that there is no cause in the operation of the system in Wales to doubt that that is so.

Mr. Janman: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's long exposition on planning in Wales. However, I want to make two brief points on which he will, perhaps, reply to me. First, unless I misheard my hon. Friend, he said that a decision was still awaited on planning permission for this particular development. However, when I spoke to the building company involved yesterday, it told me that the two show homes for the development were virtually completed—and would be completed in the next week—and that a further six homes were already under construction. I do not understand how construction can already have started on the development—obviously some time ago—if the final decision has not been taken on planning permission.

Secondly, I do not understand how the Welsh language has any relevance to planning decisions, whether in Wales or elsewhere. If people come to a particular area, the number of people there increases and so does the number of people who may wish to take up the language. We are not talking here about people leaving Wales and taking their language with them. I have to say—*[Interruption.]* I would be pleased, Madam Deputy Speaker, if there were no such sedentary interventions—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Janman: However, of course, the Welsh language is an important part of our British heritage. We are not talking about trying to stop people leaving parts of Wales and about the language dying; we are talking about the opportunity for people to come into Wales. As a number of those moving in are taking the opportunity of retiring from England, Scotland or elsewhere in Wales and are going to live in parts of the Principality where the language is still strong, it is not inconceivable that some of those people would have quite a bit of spare time on their hands and might want to learn the language of that part of the United Kingdom.

My first specific point, which my hon. Friend the Minister may or may not wish to come back on, is why, if a planning decision has not yet been made, construction work has already started on eight of the properties, and is nearly completed on two. Secondly, given my comments, can my hon. Friend put a little more meat on the bones of why a planning decision has any relevance whatsoever to the Welsh language?

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 27 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (No. 2) BILL
Orders for Third Reading read.
To be read a Third time on Thursday 4 May.

HYTHE, KENT, MARINA BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

WENTWORTH ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE SOUTHBANK BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 4 May.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Motion made,
That the petition of the Mayor and Burgesses of the London Borough of Lewisham, Telegraph Hill Residents opposed to the Tunnel Link (THROTTL) Association and Brockley against the Tunnel Link (BATTL) be referred back to the Court of Referees.—*[Ms. Ruddock.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Licensed Netsmen

1. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the licensed netsmen in the north-east of England; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): I am planning to visit the area and meet local representatives of the licensed salmon netsmen soon. I have received a number of representations about this fishery. My colleagues and I will be reviewing it—and the east of Scotland net fisheries—and presenting a report to Parliament in due course, as required by the Salmon Act 1986.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Minister aware of the great hardship caused to salmon fishermen in my constituency and elsewhere by the failure to lay the T-nets order? Can he assure the House that he will do all in his power to secure the future of north-east licensed salmon netsmen against the ill-founded but well-financed angling and riparian interests?

Mr. Thompson: I know of no hardship being caused at present. However, when we review the matter in November, I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends on both sides of the House will do their best to ensure that any new agreement is not destroyed or distorted, as the last one was, by people from the hon. Gentleman's own area.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that drift netting off the Northumberland coast poses the greatest threat to salmon conservation in the United Kingdom? When will he make it illegal, as it has been for years off the Scottish coast?

Mr. Thompson: The House now sees the two clear sides of that complicated matter. The November review, which is statutorily required by the Salmon Act 1986, probably will not abolish such netting, but we shall bring it before the House as soon as possible.

Sir Michael Shaw: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a great deal of unjustified criticism against licensed drift net fishermen, and that much of the trouble is caused not only by the increasing seal population but by unlicensed fishermen and poachers generally? Would it not be of great assistance to those in the industry and in authority if more advice were taken from the official fishing organisations on how to control unlicensed fishermen?

Mr. Thompson: Unlicensed fishermen in all sectors of fishery are a great nuisance. Given the different flavours of the views that we are hearing from all parts of the House, I am already looking forward to the debate. As my hon. Friend says, good advice should always be taken.

Dr. David Clark: Is the Minister aware that despite the activities of north-east linesmen, the Tyne is the best salmon river in England? Have the representations that the

Minister received from north-east fishermen included the issue of sewage sludge dumped off the River Tyne? When the hon. Gentleman meets north-east fishermen, will he reassure them that sewage sludge does not involve the risk of their contracting meningitis, herpes or AIDS, as that matter is of great concern to them?

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman greatly exaggerates. I am going to the north-east to see that activity and to learn what I can. I have always found that the best way to learn is to listen.

Agricultural Land

2. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about alternative uses for agricultural land.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): I receive frequent representation about alternative uses for agricultural land from a wide range of interested organisations and individuals.

Dr. Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many farmers are trying to find imaginative alternative uses for their land, especially in view of their low or negative farm incomes? Is he also aware that when they apply for planning consent some councils are dilatory, arbitrary and sometimes obstructive? What can he do to help?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware that much entrepreneurial activity is taking place in the farming community. Farmers are seeking alternative uses for land, often very effectively.

The planning issue comes up frequently, and the responses of local authorities vary around the country. In comparison with a few years ago, many more are taking a constructive and positive approach to alternative enterprises, recognising their importance to the income of farmers and to rural areas generally. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I encourage local authorities to be positive whenever possible. It is also why we recently published a booklet to assist farmers, so that they know how to approach the planning system and can put their proposals in the best possible light.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister aware that permits have been issued for the killing of Brent geese and Greenland white-fronted geese? Brent geese do not come from Brent, incidentally, so any Conservative Members who may feel enthusiastic about slaughtering them had better get that straight.

That action is being taken because the geese are allegedly damaging crops. Would it not be appropriate for the Ministry to extend compensation to farmers, so that when they are lucky enough to find the geese alighting on their land the geese can continue to crop unhindered and unslaughtered, and the farmers can continue to receive the income?

Mr. MacGregor: That raises compensation considerations rather different from any that we normally encounter, but I note what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that horse-breeding establishments are now considerable users of agricultural land and riding is becoming a major leisure industry? Is it not time that the Ministry recognised the horse as an agricultural animal and made diseases such as equine herpes notifiable?

Mr. MacGregor: When the horse is involved in agricultural activities, it is treated as an agricultural animal. As I believe my hon. Friend knows, the matter has been considered time and again and it is not solely a matter for me, but the Government's position has been made very clear.

I agree with my hon. Friend that there is no doubt that horse-based activities represent a growing alternative use of agricultural land, and perhaps one of the most important. I believe that a Little Neddy agricultural report recently suggested—I speak from memory—that up to 250,000 hectares might be thus employed.

Brussels (Visits)

3. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many officials of his Ministry have visited Brussels in the latest year for which figures are available; and what was the total cost of the visits.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Richard Ryder): The total number of visits undertaken by Ministers and officials in the financial year 1988-89 was 2,072. The average number of people per visit was two. The provisional cost was £825,253, some £300,000 of which is recoverable from European Community funds.

Mr. Grocott: That is an awful lot of money. Bearing in mind that the cost of the common agricultural policy to the taxpayer has doubled to £2·5 billion under the present Government, does the Minister agree that it would be better for all of us if more of those officials and Ministers stayed here, and if British food policy was determined in Britain rather than in Brussels?

Mr. Ryder: When our officials travel to Brussels, they fight hard for British interests. If they did not go when officials from other countries went, we should not secure such good deals as the one secured by my right hon. Friend last week.

Mr. Curry: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to dispel the increasing and pernicious myth that Brussels is staffed by an enormous, predatory bureaucracy, and to point out that many decisions are made by delegates of national Governments who are barely accountable? Would it not also cost less if we had a reasonable structure for air fares in the European Community?

Mr. Ryder: My hon. Friend is right to say that the bureaucracy in Brussels is nowhere near as large as it is painted by Opposition Members. Those who work in Brussels do a magnificent job. The present British Government have been spearheading efforts to reform the CAP and the Community. Without our contribution there would be even more officials there than there are now.

"Nuclear Accidents and the Farmer"

4. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the distribution of his Department's leaflet entitled "Nuclear Accidents and the Farmer".

Mr. Ryder: Our initial distribution was to holdings in England in the vicinity of the major nuclear installations. Large numbers of copies have also been distributed at meetings held by my officials and in response to individual requests. Distribution has been carried out principally through my Department's regional organisation and further copies remain available free of charge on request.

Mr. Home Robertson: We welcome the realistic advice in the leaflets and the acknowledgement that nuclear accidents can cause serious long-term disruption of food production. Is the Minister satisfied that the £20 million third party insurance carried by nuclear generating companies is adequate? How could a Downing street seminar advocate further nuclear power proliferation on the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, which took place 1,200 miles away but is still affecting more than 400,000 acres of British farmland three years later?

Mr. Ryder: European Commission documents show conclusively that the British Government's response to the Chernobyl incident was prompter and more comprehensive than that of other Governments in western Europe. Furthermore, the excellent leaflets to which the hon. Gentleman refers have been widely welcomed not only by farmers' organisations but by all those people who live in the vicinity of a nuclear site. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased to say, as the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) refers to himself, that the leaflets willl soon be available in Scotland and in Wales.

Mr. Martyn Jones: May I remind the Minister that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report said that the British Government's reaction to Chernobyl was the worst of the nine countries concerned and that the Select Committee on Agriculture, of which I was a member, made the same point in its report, referred to the inadequacy of the compensation and highlighted various other matters that the Minister has neglected to recall?

Mr. Ryder: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. The Select Committee on Agriculture, of which he was a member, did not say that our response was worse than that of other countries in Europe. On the contrary, the Select Committee report showed conclusively that the British Government's response had been prompter and more comprehensive than that of most other Governments in western Europe.

National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations

5. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I last met representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations when I visited the Fishing '89 exhibition in Glasgow on 14 April. A number of important issues were discussed, including total allowable catches, licensing with reference to under 10m vessels and light dues.

Mr. Michie: Does the Minister agree with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations that more action should be taken to protect marine life? If a true blue Tory party slowly turning green wishes to prove that claim, it must take its industrialist friends to task and ensure that they reduce the amount of industrial waste being dumped in the sea.

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the effective action that the Government are taking on what he calls green issues. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister says that we must take effective action on green issues, she does not then say to me that she does not meant it. She means, "Double and redouble your efforts," and that is what is happening. The amount of waste being dumped into the North sea by this country is very strictly monitored and it is decreasing year by year.

Mr. Harris: Did my hon. Friend see the lead letter in *The Times* last Monday, headed "Fishermen, Cod Quota Development", which was written by one of my constituents, Mr. Mahon? That letter sums up the frustration and anger of many Cornish fishermen about the halt to cod fishing in the Channel. Will the Minister confirm that scientists will examine the basis of total allowable catch proportions before the next full meeting of fisheries Ministers in June to review the TACs and the cod quota?

Mr. Thompson: I fully understand the frustrations of Cornish and Channel fishermen at having their cod quota curtailed. There will be no cod fishing until later this year because the fishermen caught more than half the quota in the first six months. I have seen the letter in *The Times* from my hon. Friend's constituent. I have it in my hand now. My hon. Friend will remember that we increased the tonnage of cod from 22,000 tonnes to 23,900 tonnes. We are not being idle in this matter. We are discussing with various other nations quota swaps, among other possibilities, so that we can reintroduce cod fishing before July, but that is a faint hope and I cannot promise that our negotiations will be successful. Nevertheless, we are trying very hard and we are searching for ways to improve fishing opportunities for our Channel fishermen.

Dr. Godman: I, too, met members of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations in Yorkshire recently. They expressed a number of concerns, one of which centres on the need for a fair and sensible decommissioning system to meet European Community guidelines. A more pressing concern was the loss of noxious or toxic cargoes on or close to fishing grounds. Does the Minister agree that following the foundering of the motor vessel Perintis in the Channel last month, a hazardous and noxious substances convention should be set up? What is the Ministry doing about that? While the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food may not be the lead Department in these matters, surely the concerns surrounding the loss of those cargoes close to fishing grounds should be discussed at the next Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels.

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. There is hardly a fishing council in Brussels or anywhere else in the world that is not concerned about pollution. The hon. Gentleman began by asking about decommissioning, which is one of the many options that we have in our armoury to ensure that we retain a prosperous fishing industry. As for the Perintis, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pressed very hard to ensure that we used every possible means to recover the barrels from the bottom of

the Channel. HMS Challenger successfully recovered all but four of those barrels—if my memory serves me correctly, it recovered 28 out of 32—in the past 10 days. We are now considering the other four barrels seriously. The matter is of very high priority.

Farmers (Incomes)

6. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the average fall in farmers' incomes in real terms during 1988.

Mr. MacGregor: Individual farmers' incomes depend on many factors, but aggregate farming income fell in real terms by 28 per cent. between 1987 and 1988. Real incomes increased in the hills, dairy and the other grazing livestock sectors throughout the United Kingdom. Those figures relate to family farming activities and do not take account of income from the diversified activities on or off the farm.

Mr. Colvin: To help cushion the fall in farm incomes of 28 per cent. in real terms, and further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), will my right hon. Friend have urgent talks with Ministers at the Department of the Environment who are responsible for planning, with a view to producing new guidelines for planning consents for redundant farm buildings, which can be of considerable assistance to farmers facing difficulties and are often unreasonably refused? My right hon. Friend referred to his booklet, but the booklet does no more than repeat the existing rules. We want new rules.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of making different uses of redundant farm buildings and much is being done in that respect throughout the country. I have had regular discussions with my right hon. Friend on that matter. Guidelines have been produced and we constantly urge local authorities to be as positive as possible on the re-use of redundant farm buildings.

Mr. Martlew: When assessing farm incomes in the future, will the Minister take into account the large savings that some farmers will be making as a result of the poll tax at the expense of their employees who live in tied cottages? Will he advise the National Farmers Union of England and Wales that compensation should be paid to those employees who live in tied cottages to recompense them for the loss of earnings? Will he also recommend that the NFU does not take into account the disgusting and outrageous decision of the Scottish NFU, which was mean to say the least, that it is right to refuse to compensate those agricultural workers who lose out under the poll tax and have been badly hit by the poll tax bills coming through their doors this month?

Mr. MacGregor: As in the case of the rating system, that is a matter for discussion and negotiation between farmers and their employees. I know that in the past, many employers have been generous in the way in which they dealt with the rating system.

Mr. Hague: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one factor which helped the incomes of hill farmers in 1988 was the prompt payment of hill livestock compensatory allowance? Will he accept that there has been some delay in the payments during 1989 and can he give any assurances about that for future years?

Mr. MacGregor: There are a number of matters relating to payments and other issues affecting farmers on which Ministry officials have been hard pressed. It is a question of priorities, but I understand the problems caused by the delays and I note what my hon. Friend has said. We have no wish to delay payments longer than necessary.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister consider carefully the impact of interest rates on farm incomes? Can nothing be done to mitigate the high rate of interest that farmers have to pay? Is the Minister aware that farmers in my constituency constantly tell me that they are at a disadvantage compared with farmers in other European countries because, according to them, European farmers have systems which mitigate the level of interest rates that they have to pay?

Mr. MacGregor: With regard to other European countries, under the structures regulations it is possible to use either low interest rate schemes or grant schemes. We do the latter. More generally, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the conditions that made it right and necessary for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to raise interest rates. I have never believed that it is easily possible to find any scheme specifically to direct low, subsidised interest rates to any particular group, and it is difficult to see where to start. It is not right to look for special exemptions for the farming community.

CAP

7. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on recent developments in the common agricultural policy of the European Community.

Mr. MacGregor: As I said in the House yesterday, last week's CAP price settlement was very satisfactory. It was fully consistent with United Kingdom objectives for the CAP and expenditure, and the substantial green pound devaluation that I secured benefits United Kingdom farmers' income and competitiveness.

Mr. Boswell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he tell the House, with all due modesty, whether he is aware of any other members states which, at the price-fixing negotiations, achieved a bigger devaluation of their green currency or a larger proportion of increase in benefits for farm incomes? Will my right hon. Friend press on with the good work to ensure the elimination of monetary discrimination altogether in 1990?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There was one other country which did as well. That was Greece, but the condition to the Greek economy and the general requirements which made that necessary are totally different from ours. It is therefore fair to say that we undoubtedly secured the best outcome on agrimonetary matters and green currencies. I agree with my hon. Friend that that is extremely important for farmers' incomes. Of itself, it should improve them by £155 million in a full year. I also agree that it is crucial that we stay on target to see tha the real monetary gaps are reduced throughout to zero. As my hon. Friend knows, we have done well in most sectors, but we want to achieve zero throughout by 1992 so that we have a genuine single market in agriculture.

Mr. Hood: We heard the Minister express some concern yesterday about the amount of fraud in the common agricultural policy, but is the Minister aware that the Select Committee on European Legislation recently visited Luxembourg to meet the Court of Auditors and that we discussed at long length the billions of pounds involved in fraud and the efforts of the Court of Auditors to catch the people who are committing the fraud? We were also told that for the past two years the United Kingdom Government has refused to give access to the Court of Auditors——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is Question Time.

Mr. Hood: Will the Minister explain to the House, in the light of his concern yesterday, why the Government have refused to co-operate with the Court of Auditors for the past two years?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that we are refusing to co-operate with the Court of Auditors' general approach to this question. On a number of occasions in the Agriculture Council in recent months, I have specifically referred to the recent Court of Auditors' report on the operation of the intervention system and specifically asked that its recommendations be followed up and agreed in our Council. As I said yesterday, we are now making considerable progress. I welcome the Court of Auditors' recent report and certainly think that we should follow it up.

Mr. Dykes: Just to get *The Times* newspaper beside itself for another hysterical anti-fraud headline, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Court of Auditors has solemnly reminded us all that fraud amounts to nowhere near the £6 billion figure that *The Times* keeps giving in its headlines, and that all the member states are equally involved in fraud, which is a serious matter, and that the Reading cold storage agency has been the least co-operative in supplying cold storage audit figures to the Court of Auditors?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. By definition, we do not know the precise figures, but most informed observers think that £6 billion is far too high. Nevertheless, I am sure that my hon. Friend will think that something well short of that amount would also be far too high. That is why we take these matters seriously and why we wish to pursue fraud in any direction, wherever it occurs.

Mr. Home Robertson: What action is being taken to ensure that eggs imported from other European countries are up to the high health standards that are now required on British farms? How are British consumers and producers being protected against the effects of substandard imported eggs?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of this. First, we have stepped up our monitoring of imported eggs and if we find any cases of salmonella—I have had no reports of any to date—I shall, of course, be taking that matter up straight away with the Minister of the member state concerned.

Secondly, we are now pursuing within the European Community the whole question of action on salmonella and all such diseases. A report is now being drawn up on this matter and I hope that it will lead to action. As always, it takes some time to reach agreement on these matters within the European Community, but I entirely agree about the importance of tackling this at a European Community level.

Livestock Producers

8. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the prospects for cattle, sheep and pig producers prior to the completion of the internal market, in 1992.

Mr. MacGregor: The conditions for livestock producers between now and 1992 will be affected by a number of factors, including some changes, connected with completion of the single internal market which are at an early stage of discussion. My objective remains to seek arrangements under which United Kingdom producers can compete on thoroughly equal terms with those in other Community countries.

Mr. Gill: Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of the House on his considerable and beneficial achievement in securing the partial elimination of MCAs, which will go a long way to helping British livestock producers to be more competitive? Does he accept that many British livestock producers look forward to the completion of the internal market in 1992 and will he assist them by instituting a survey to demonstrate what comparative advantage there may be in the production of sheepmeat and beef on completion of the single market?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the first part of his question. I hope that everyone will recognise just how far we have gone in improving the position of the United Kingdom industry relative to even two years ago. In the livestock sectors to which my hon. Friend has referred, two years ago we had negative MCAs ranging from 24 to 31 points; today, in three of the four sectors, there is no MCA and only a small one of under 2 per cent. in the other. We have therefore already made considerable progress towards the objective that we set ourselves. Indeed, we have practically reached it already in the livestock sectors.

On my hon. Friend's second question, my Department is co-sponsoring with Food from Britain, the Home-grown Cereals Authority and the Food Research Council a study to highlight, among other things, the impact which the single market will have on agriculture in the 1990s. I hope that that will give some indications in the direction that my hon. Friend seeks. I am sure that he will also agree that one of the benefits of the recent agreement on the changes in the beef sector is that clawback of exports has been removed, which should enable producers to expand their prospects within the Community in general.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister realise that, if he abolishes the Potato Marketing Board, there will be a huge increase in the amount of potatoes fed to pigs and other livestock—the subject of this question? Will he therefore give me an absolute assurance that he will make no decision regarding the Potato Marketing Board until he meets my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), for East Lothian (Mr. Hume Robertson) and for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and me on 10 May at 3.45 pm?

Mr. MacGregor: I congratulate the hon. Gentlman on his ingenuity in working the Potato Marketing Board into

this question. I have received all the written consultations now and carried out a number of meetings on this question, and I look forward to meeting the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the matter on the date he mentioned. I cannot give a precise date for when we shall be making our announcement, but I am certainly listening very carefully to all the consultations.

Mr. Hill: I declare an interest in this as one of the major sheep and pig producers in Hampshire. I have to say very clearly that we are not looking forward to 1992. In fact, many of the pig producers in Hampshire are looking forward only to bankruptcy. They are not making money at this time; we feel that MAFF has rather neglected our cause and that something should be done, certainly between now and 1992.

Mr. MacGregor: In fact, we have a single market already, because I have been able to negotiate down to zero the monetary compensatory amounts in the pigmeat sector. So the pigmeat sector is now not suffering from that disadvantage. That is one of the things that we have achieved within the last year. My hon. Friend will know that the real profitability of the pigmeat sector depends on supply and demand. That is now more sensible and we have therefore seen an improvement in returns to pig producers. I have been well aware of the difficulties they have had up to now.

Research Whaling

9. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he estimates the United Kingdom's action against research whaling will be successful.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We have already met with success as Korea has not pursued its intended research whaling and Japan, Iceland and Norway have all modified their programmes. We will continue to press strongly against unjustified research whaling.

Mr. Hanley: The whole House will support the initiative of my right hon. and hon. Friends in trying to reduce the often cynical and fraudulent practice of commercial whaling under the guise of scientific research. My hon. Friend will remember that recently, at the International Whaling Commission, 16 nations out of 32 followed the British Government's lead in trying to introduce a moratorium in this area. When does my hon. Friend believe that that 17th country, which would make all the difference, will follow the British Government's lead?

Mr. Thompson: My hon. Friend is well known for his constant and caring attitude on this matter. He is wrong in only one slight degree: it was not at the International Whaling Commission's convention, but on our own initiative that the United Kingdom wrote round to various countries about Japanese whaling and got only 16 votes, with four against and some abstentions. We shall continue to press this matter year by year.

Dr. David Clark: Can I add our support to the Government stance on whaling, which has been very commendable indeed? Can I also draw the Minister's attention to the explosive expansion of research whaling by the Japanese? Will the Minister seek again to influence the Japanese to try to cut back on that huge explosion?

Mr. Thompson: It was because of this country's persistence last year that we reduced the Japanese intended catch from 825 to 241 whales. I thank the hon. Gentleman and his party for their support on this important matter.

Goats' Milk

10. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the Goat Producers Association concerning legislative control over the production of goats' milk.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have received a copy of the circular letter that the chairman of the Goat Producers Association sent to a number of hon. Members earlier this year.

Mr. Coombs: Bearing in mind the purely voluntary clean milk scheme of the Goat Producers Association, is it the case that, under the Food Act 1984, there are specific regulations for monitoring the quality of cows' milk but not goats' milk? Therefore, bearing in mind any impending food legislation, is there a strong case for extending the regulations to goats' milk? Does the Minister intend to do that?

Mr. Thompson: My hon. Friend is quite right. We have no powers. The wording of the Food Act means that detailed regulations applying to cows' milk cannot be extended to goats' milk. However, consultations on the new Food Bill have suggested that powers should be taken to enable Ministers to regulate the production of milk from other animals as well as cows.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister take great care to ensure that people who own small herds of goats are not placed in ruinous difficulty as a result of any regulations?

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to learn that the National Goat Society held its annual international conference in my constituency this year. Therefore, I was able to discuss these important matters with it face to face.

Council for the Protection of Rural England

11. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the chairman of the Council for the Protection of Rural England; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Ryder: I met representatives of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, including the chairman, on 22 March, when we discussed a number of issues of concern to them.

Mr. Arnold: Did my hon. Friend also discuss a recent proposal to land the farming community with a further £3 billion bill for water quality improvements? Is he aware that that proposal was made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor)? Does it not represent a further extension of Labour's policy of clobbering the farming community?

Mr. Ryder: My hon. Friend is quite right. Between now and the next general election, we shall return frequently to the remarks which the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) made in the course of an interview last week.

Mr. Jopling: Did my hon. Friend discuss with the chairman the possibility of designating further environmentally sensitive areas? If he did not, will he do so next time he meets him?

Mr. Ryder: I did not discuss with the chairman the possibility of extending the number of ESAs. However, as my right hon. Friend is aware, we shall examine the matter in greater detail during the next two to three years, and I shall look forward to discussing it with the chairman of the CPRE during the next few months.

Set-aside

12. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the latest figures on the uptake of the set-aside scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: About 1,800 United Kingdom farmers are setting aside about 58,000 hectares of arable land in the first year of the scheme. We will be opening the scheme for further applications shortly.

Mr. Lord: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Although no one enjoys seeing cereal farmers' difficulties, everybody in the country must be pleased to see the amount of tree planting that is now taking place. I urge my right hon. Friend to continue persuading farmers to plant trees wherever possible. Will he do his very best to reassure them about the long-term existence of such supporting schemes?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I will indeed. My hon. Friend will know that there is interaction between the set-aside scheme and the farm woodland scheme. He will be pleased to know that we have just received the first six months' figures for the farm woodland scheme. In the first six months, more than 800 farmers applied to plant 14,100 acres with trees, a high proportion of which will be broadleaves. That is an extremely good response, but I certainly intend to continue to publicise the scheme. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be interested to know also that the Norwich division has had the best response among all the Ministry divisions, with 107 cases covering 711 hectares.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister accept that many millions of people look askance at a scheme that pays farmers to watch trees and grass grow when their income has diminished, while the selfsame Government have frozen child benefit so that the poorest of the poor have to watch their children grow without additional help from the Government, led by the woman in blue on the Minister's left? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: That is not unparliamentary, but it does not help.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is totally wrong. On the question of farm woodlands, which we are discussing, he is out of touch with his party. There is widespread agreement that the encouragement of a more attractive landscape, which the farm woodland scheme is assisting us in doing, is of great benefit to future generations. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should consult his hon. Friends to find out how they respond to the farm woodland scheme that we introduced and that is already going so well.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Malins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most important messages from yesterday's seminar on global climate is the environmental advantage of nuclear power? Does she further agree that we should all try to get that message across to the whole country?

The Prime Minister: Yes; one of the important messages from the seminar and from many other scientific sources is that one of our greatest concerns at the moment is the sharp increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which are staying there. Future policies must take account of that and try to reduce the increase. One of the best ways of doing that is to concentrate on nuclear power stations, which do not add to greenhouse gases. Nuclear power is one of the surest ways of maintaining economic development without damaging the environment.

Mr. Kinnock: Since the doctors, meeting today, have unanimously rejected the Prime Minister's National Health Service proposals, will she follow her usual practice, or will she listen to them?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health has amply answered much of the false propaganda that has been put out by doctors to their patients. In fact, the doctors have done very much better under this Government, and so have the patients. When the full White Paper is in operation, it is designed to give much better service to the patients.

Mr. Kinnock: Does not the Prime Minister yet understand that the great majority of people know that the National Health Service is much safer in the hands of their GPs than it will ever be in the hands of this Government?

The Prime Minister: Under this Government, there are more GPs and they have lower lists. Therefore, they can give more attention to their patients. As the *New Statesman* article pointed out:

> "Many of those with larger practices are already queuing up to become GP budget-holders."

In the article one doctor pointed out that when the National Health Service White Paper was in operation, all that would change was that he would start, as a GP, to be paid for the extra service that he provided. He said:

> "I am certainly keen to become a budget holder, which will be a natural extension of the kind of general practice I have been providing for years."

Under the proposals, the doctors with the heavier work load will get more pay. That seems right.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the strength of Europe lies in its members working closely together in defence of their individual freedoms, freedoms that have given this country the most improved economy in Europe and made it the most favoured choice for inward investment?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. I believe that those freedoms are backed up by an economic freedom that would be put in jeopardy if we had a Europe that tied itself and industry in bureaucratic knots. We must see that that does not happen.

Q2. **Mr. Terry Lewis:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lewis: Will the right hon. Lady consult the Conservative Family Campaign, which is most concerned about the suffering of families up and down the land through premium telephone services? Will she further send for the tape shown on Independent Television News last Wednesday, view the unedited version and then take personal control of that sordid service which has been released upon families?

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern. I cannot agree precisely to the things that he has asked of me, but I shall certainly put it to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Soames: Will my right hon. Friend take some time this afternoon further to clarify the Government's reaction to the Delors report?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made the Government's view very clear. The Delors report is aimed at a federal Europe, a common currency and a common economic policy, which would take many economic policies, including fiscal policy, out of the hands of the House, and that is completely unacceptable. It would also require a treaty amendment, which we do not believe would ever be passed by the House because of the lack of sovereignty that it would imply.

Q3. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Salvation Army has found it necessary to repeat General Booth's survey 100 years ago of homelessness in London? As the country approaches the anniversary of its 10-year sentence under the right hon. Lady's leadership, what miserable excuse will she offer the House this afternoon for the doubling of poverty and homelessness in London since 1979? I do not know what gift her colleagues will buy her to commemorate her anniversary——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions.

Mr. Banks: Opposition Members want to give her a cardboard box, because cardboard cities are the most stark mementoes of 10 years of Thatcherism.

The Prime Minister: There are about 1·8 million more homes now than there were 10 years ago, which is quite a good record. This country has the highest standard of living that it has ever known. With regard to homelessness, there have been additional resources totalling more than £74 million since December 1987, and the gross provision for the Housing Corporation increased from £705 million in 1987-88 to £737 million in 1988-89. Some 18,000 places have been approved in the past eight years for the single homeless with special needs. Real incomes have increased throughout all income groups.

Mr. Banks: Tell them that on the south bank.

The Prime Minister: There has been a real increase in disposable income between 1979 and 1985, with an increase of 5·9 per cent. for the bottom tenth, and real take-home pay for the lowest one tenth of adult male full-time earners has risen by 13·1 per cent. over the past 10 years.

Mr. Marlow: If my right hon. Friend were the Chancellor of the West German Republic, would her main priority not be the unification of Germany and further traditional moves towards involvement with eastern Europe? What does this mean not only for NATO, but for the European Community?

The Prime Minister: That would not be my main priority. On the question of the European Community, my hon. Friend will know that goods come into the Federal Republic of Germany from East Germany without any levy being paid. Therefore, the Federal Republic of Germany receives a special bonus from Europe that is not available to anyone else.

Q4. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sillars: Is the Prime Minister aware of the indelible stain on her political reputation from the rejection of democratic fundamental demands for human rights by a small but nevertheless important group of people? I refer to the Chinese population of Hong Kong. Does she not accept—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Sillars.

Mr. Sillars: Does not the Prime Minister accept that it is only if they get British passports and resident rights in the United Kingdom that the people of Hong Kong will have any real bargaining power with the Chinese Government? Before she answers, will she reflect upon the paradox that the way in which human beings are being disposed of there is more akin to Stalinism than Thatcherism, which is supposed to be about fundamental human rights and libertarianism?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Gentleman knows that the standard of living in Hong Kong greatly exceeds anything in China, through the efforts of the people of Hong Kong. I know there is strong feeling in Hong Kong about the particular point that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I believe that the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs is either in Hong Kong now or has recently been there and doubtless it will have something else to say upon

this. At present the position is governed by the British Nationality Act 1981, and if the hon. Gentleman wishes to suggest any amendments, I am sure that he will do so.

Q5. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: Will my right hon. Friend have talks with the Secretary of State for the Environment about the performance of the Labour-controlled Hertfordshire county council, which over the past four years has increased its staff by more than 2,000? Of the 300 additional staff appointed to social services, only 20 per cent. are social workers and the other 80 per cent. are administrators. Is it not surprising in those circumstances that the Labour finance chairman of Hertfordshire has——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not the Government's responsibility.

The Prime Minister: I think that we all heard what my hon. Friend said, and he carries a very important message. The 10 counties with the lowest rate poundages are all controlled by the Conservative party; none of the 10 counties with the highest rate poundages are controlled by Conservatives.

Q6. **Mr. Alan Roberts:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Roberts: Is the Prime Minister aware that car exhausts make a significant and growing contribution to the greenhouse gases? *[Interruption.]* In April, the European Parliament, including Conservative Euro-Members of Parliament from Britain, voted in favour of imposing United States standards on car emissions in Europe. Those standards allow for four times less pollution than the current European standards. How can the Government be taken seriously if, in the Council of Ministers in Europe, they veto the proposals to have those increased standards imposed in Europe? How can their concern about global warming be taken seriously, since the Government have just massively cut programmes on energy conservation and insulation?

The Prime Minister: If I heard the hon. Gentleman correctly—I did not hear the beginning—he was talking about greenhouse gases. Was he then talking about car emissions?

Mr. Roberts: Standards in Europe—and you vetoed it.

The Prime Minister: Now look, the science— *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Now I have identified what the hon. Gentleman is asking about, may I, with the permission of the House, point out that the science on this matter has yet to be resolved? The three-way catalyst makes a car engine 10 per cent. less efficient and therefore on some interpretations can lead to more greenhouse gases. There are those who say that the lean-burn engine, especially on smaller cars, is much more efficient and, together with a lesser catalyst, would have less greenhouse effect and every bit as much control over reducing the emissions from cars. I trust that I have made myself clear.

Q7. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Michael Clark: In view of the recent petrol price increases, will my right hon. Friend, during the course of her busy day, consider whether it would be appropriate to hasten the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's deliberations on the major oil companies, with a view to divesting them of their retail outlets? Is not this the way to get increased competition, and the way to prevent prices at all the pumps from being raised to the same level at the same time?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend has said, the Director General of Fair Trading referred the wholesale supply of petrol in the United Kingdom to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on 9 November 1988. I regret that the Commission's report is not expected until this November. My hon. Friend asked whether it could be speeded up. I will pass the message to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Q8. **Mr. Jimmy Wray:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wray: What plans do the Government have for eradicating poverty in Scotland? Does the Prime Minister realise that last year 16,000 people in Scotland had their electricity cut off? Does she realise that a European report on poverty, published today, places Great Britain sixth?

The Prime Minister: With regard to poverty in Europe, the figures that I gave earlier, in response to another question, are the correct ones because they are taken from figures that are comparable with one another. Scotland is enjoying the highest standard of living that it has ever known. The average weekly earnings for men and women are higher than in any other part of the United Kingdom, save the south-east.

Serjeant at Arms (Retirement)

MR. SPEAKER *acquainted the House that he had received a letter from Sir Victor Le Fanu, the Serjeant at Arms, which* Mr. Speaker *read as follows:*

I have the honour to make application that you will be pleased to sanction my retirement on 30th September, 1989 from my office by patent of Her Majesty's Serjeant at Arms attending the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Being in my sixty fifth year, and in my forty seventh year of consecutive service in the Army and in the service of the House of Commons, I think that the time has come for me to make room for a successor.

I wish to record my deep appreciation of the kindness and consideration shown to me by all Members of the House of Commons, which has made my term of office here so happy and rewarding.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Mr. Speaker, I am certain all hon. Members will share my sincere regret at hearing the letter you have just read out. The occasion for us to express formally our thanks and appreciation to Sir Victor Le Fanu for his long service to the House will arise later, when I shall move an appropriate motion. That I am not doing so today is in line with precedent and does not detract in any way from the very high regard in which I know Sir Victor is held on both sides of the House for his long and distinguished service.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): On behalf of the Opposition, I join in the expressions of thanks to Sir Victor for his work for us as Serjeant at Arms. Sometimes criticisms are directed at the Serjeant at Arms and his staff, but usually we find that that is because they have been expected to provide a quart out of a pint pot. I have undying admiration for Sir Victor's unwillingness, when challenged by Members, to reply, "If you want a better service you had better vote for it and pay for it." I thank Sir Victor for his work, and I thank him too for his diplomacy.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I associate right hon. and hon. Members of my party with the remarks that have been made about the Serjeant at Arms. He has always been most courteous in his dealings with hon. Members. Nothing has ever been too much trouble for him in any dealings I have had with him. He has earned respect on all sides of the House. If I may say so, in spite of the additional strains that we all now have to suffer as a result of increased security, he has prevailed and has always done sterling service for everyone in the House. We look forward to contributing more fully to the tributes at the appropriate time.

Mr. Speaker: There will be an occasion to pay formal tributes in due course. Meanwhile, consultations on the recommendation for a successor to Sir Victor Le Fanu are taking place through the House of Commons Commission.

Business of the House

3.34 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

TUESDAY 2 MAY—Opposition Day (9th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Doctors' Rejection of the White Paper on the National Health Service. Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "Teacher Shortages". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Supplemental timetable motion on and consideration of Lords Amendments to the Official Secrets Bill.

WEDNESDAY 3 MAY—Timetable motion on the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill.

Second Reading of the Companies Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 4 MAY—Second Reading of the Police Officers (Central Service) Bill *[Lords]*.

Afterwards motion to take note of EC document on controls of persons at intra-Community frontiers. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Followed by motion to take note of EC documents on public procurement. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 5 MAY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 8 MAY—Progress on consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

[Debates on Thursday 4 May
First Debate
Relevant European Community Document
10412/88 *Controls of persons at intra-Community borders*
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 15-xi (1988-89) para 1
Second Debate
Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 7496/88 *Public works contracts*
(b) 5909/89 *Public works contracts*
(c) 10497/88 *Public supply and works contracts: compliance with Community rules*
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 43-xxxv (1987-88) para 2, and HC 43-xxxvii (1987-88) para 2
(b) Not yet considered by the Committee
(c) HC 15-xi (1988-89) para 2.]

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement.

Are the Government prepared to have a number of sittings of a Special Standing Committee on the Companies Bill so that those serving on the Standing Committee can take evidence from Ministers and officials on that technically complex measure? Since the Standing Orders were changed to permit the use of Special Standing Committees in that way, the Government have introduced 435 Bills, only five of which have been subject to that procedure.

I deplore the Government's intention to introduce a guillotine motion next week on the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill. That is an important measure which endangers educational standards in Scotland and

Scottish Members should be given every opportunity to go through it in the detail that is necessary. There is no good reason to curtail the debate.

Has the Leader of the House noted that the Opposition have chosen to debate the proposed changes in the NHS on an Opposition day next week? Is it not about time that the Government got round to giving us the promised full day's debate on what, after all, are their proposals? Will he also tell us when we are likely to get the long-promised debate on the proposal to substitute student loans for student grants?

When shall we have the opportunity—this again, is important for Scotland—to debate the statutory instrument which is at present being implemented in Scotland on the collection of poll tax from income being paid to people in Scotland?

Finally, when are we likely to have a debate on the Government-induced difficulties facing British industry in the run-up to 1992?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman asks six questions about the business for next week. The Companies Bill has already been before the other place but I take note of his suggestion that this would be an appropriate measure to refer to a Special Standing Committee and the best plan is to discuss that through the usual channels.

The most controversial clauses of the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill, those which enable Scottish schools to become self-governing if parents so wish, have largely been covered. However, the Committee has taken 106 hours to get that far and needs to make better progress on the remaining 43 clauses. I shall be tabling a timetable motion later today, but I can tell the House that it will allow more than sufficient time in which to consider the important matters that remain.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health welcomes the opportunity that the Opposition have presented him with to correct the Opposition's misleading and distorted allegations, and he will certainly take that opportunity next week. However, I recognise that I have promised a full day's debate on the NHS and I shall provide that. Discussions through the usual channels will be necessary to find a suitable day. I have already made it clear that the best time for a debate on student top-up loans will be when the current discussions with the financial institutions have been concluded. However, I note the hon. Gentleman's point.

I believe it would be best if I discussed the statutory instrument on the community charge through the usual channels, if we can find a suitable time for that debate.

I realise that the matter of 1992 is a very important subject and wholly suitable for debate. Meanwhile, I cannot promise a debate but there are many opportunities on the Finance Bill and other Bills when hon. Members who have points to make might find an ingenious way of making them.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Does my right hon. Friend not consider that it is about time we had a debate on the Army Estimates, particularly bearing in mind that several important events are taking place now that could have a significant impact on the size and shape of our ground forces?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope to be able to arrange a debate on the Army before long, and that will certainly provide the opportunity that he is seeking.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Leader of the House consult the Ministers responsible for the Government's reaction to the Griffiths report recommendations? Is he aware that they have been variously describing the imminence of the Government's reaction to this report, for some weeks, if not months, as "appearing shortly"? There must be a limit to the amount of time this takes. Can the Minister guarantee an early statement on the matter? Also, what are the Government doing about bringing forward proposals for televising the proceedings of the House in time to enable the test pilot work to be done in the summer recess in time for a start next autumn?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the demand for a debate on the Griffiths proposals. Although we have just had a debate on the matter, that is not adequate for what the House wants. The Government are not ready to come forward with their proposals, so I cannot give a specific date when that will occur. As soon as that is ready, a proper statement will be made.

Those of us on the Select Committee considering the matter are awaiting the moment when we complete our report on the televising of the proceedings in the House. I will not be revealing any great secret when I say that we are near the end of the report. It will then be presented to the House, and I will arrange a debate as soon as I can.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Could my right hon. Friend find time soon to debate what are serious shortcomings in the Highways Act 1980, which allow builders, when they are refurbishing, to erect gantries and scaffolding not only over the pavement but into the roadway for a distance of 6 to 8 ft.? I know that this is a sign of the prosperity of our city, but there are now 1,000 of these sites, some of them serious traffic hazards. I am assured by Westminster city council that it does not have power to control these works and, in some cases, as at the bottom of Parliament street, the pavement itself is reduced to only two people wide and is a serious hazard for pedestrians.

Mr. Wakeham: I appreciate the concern my hon. Friend has over this issue; perhaps it is more widely spread. I cannot promise an early debate at the moment, but she could seek opportunities to raise the matter on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helen's, South): The Minister for Social Security last night, in answer to my question, gave an unequivocal undertaking to the House in respect of payments out of the disaster fund to those who have been bereaved and injured on Merseyside. Since then the Department has issued a further advisory memorandum that seems to detract from that undertaking. The hon. Gentleman went on the radio at lunchtime today further muddying the waters. Bearing that in mind, will the Leader of the House induce his hon. Friend, before much more time has passed, to clarify the position in the House?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think the situation is as confused as the hon. Gentleman seeks to make out. My

[Mr. Wakeham]

hon. Friend was referring to new social security rules that will come into effect some time late in the summer of 1990, not now.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Is my right hon. Friend aware that during the passage of the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill the Opposition actually filibustered an amendment the Minister had accepted? So determined are they, for petty political reasons, to have a guillotine that this morning they actually filibustered an amendment that would allow schools to opt back into authority control. That is what the Opposition have been doing. We need a timetable motion, and we need it now.

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for supporting my proposal, but I would not necessarily use his words in commenting on Opposition tactics. I leave it to them to defend themselves.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): As the convener of the Scottish group of Labour Members of Parliament, I support my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in his opposition to the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill. The Leader of the House indicated the time taken by the Committee, in which my right hon. and hon. Friends have been working assiduously—relative to the importance we attach to the matters that have so far been debated. Other matters still to be discussed include teachers' salaries and further education, which will require an equal amount of debating time. It is disgraceful for the Leader of the House to impose a guillotine at this stage.

Mr. Wakeham: No, it is perfectly reasonable of me to impose a guillotine. From my reading of the Standing Committee *Hansard*, I suspect that the Opposition strove from the start to have the Bill guillotined. I note that on several occasions when the Government accepted Opposition amendments in Committee, the Opposition prolonged debate for several hours thereafter. It does not seem to me that the Opposition made a serious effort properly to discuss the Bill.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): Before too much synthetic heat is generated from the Opposition Benches, will my right hon. Friend remind Opposition Members, in the light of their recent behaviour in Committee on the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill, of the old adage that when one is in a hole, one stops digging?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes. I am sure that my right hon. Friend is right. Perhaps I should also remind the Opposition of what happened in 1976, when a guillotine was used in similar circumstances.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): On the subject of Tuesday's debate on the National Health Service, is the Leader of the House aware that I, in common with most right hon. and hon. Members, have received hundreds of letters from my constituents who are concerned about the Government's proposals? They are specifically concerned about the proposed new contracts for general practitioners, cash-limiting GP's budgets and what that will mean for the chronically sick and elderly, and the proposal to allow hospitals such as St. Bartholomew's in my own constituency to opt out and what that will mean for local services for the poor and the sick. Will the right hon. Gentleman find time at the earliest opportunity for a full debate, so that the Government may answer the fears and questions of millions of people throughout the country?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the hon. Lady thus far—there is some necessity for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health to put right mischievous and damaging statements made by various people in that dispute. I do not know whether the hon. Lady was present at questions yesterday, when my right hon. and learned Friend saw off all the Opposition's criticisms.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that during Prime Minister's Question Time on Tuesday I raised the question whether public companies such as Lonrho or House of Fraser should return documents that clearly give the impression of having been stolen, and that newspapers such as *The Observer* should do the same? During the course of my question, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)—to whom I gave notice that I would be raising this matter today—implied that returning stolen documents is not something that he or his constituents are in the habit of doing. In view of that, and as the Opposition appear to be opposed to the idea that it is right that stolen documents or other property should be returned to its owner, will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on that subject?

Mr. Wakeham: Questions of law-breaking and of prosecution are not for me, but I shall venture this far down that road. I believe that the returning of stolen property is something that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House support.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Why is the Leader of the House so opposed to the Special Standing Committee procedure? Is he not aware that it was invented, and is particularly well suited for, legislation such as the Companies Bill, which is largely a technical matter? It would be far quicker to consider that Bill by cross-examining the Minister concerned in Select Committee than by putting down endless amendments, and would in many ways be to the Government's advantage to adopt that procedure. Why is the Leader of the House so much less progressive in such matters than his distinguished predecessor, Lord St. John of Fawsley?

Mr. Wakeham: I would not want to say anything to refute the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I aspire to reach the high levels set by my right hon. and noble Friend on all occasions.

I said no word against the Special Standing Committee. I thought that I had been extremely helpful—rather more helpful than the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who speaks from the Front Bench on these matters—in saying that I would consider it. I hope that the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) does not think that means that I will necessarily accept it, but his request is reasonable and, as I have said, I shall now consider it.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): The review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement has now been proceeding for six months. Why does my right hon. Friend continue to deny the House an opportunity to express its opinion?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that I am denying the House such an opportunity. I simply have not been able to arrange a debate in the immediate past, and I am afraid that I see no opportunity of arranging one in the immediate future. I am, however, considering the matter, as I recognise that a number of people believe that a debate should take place and I should like to be able to satisfy them.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Will the Leader of the House tell his right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) that his advice is not strictly necessary, as the Government, having found themselves in a hole in Committee, have now decided to stop digging and to introduce the guillotine?

Does the Leader of the House not realise that at one stage the Minister on the Committee accepted Opposition amendments which were then voted down by his own Back Benchers? That is a tragedy, but it is no excuse to cut short debate on a Bill that has not been properly examined. The Scottish people will not accept this decision.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not want to contradict the hon. Gentleman, but I am told that his memory of the occasion does not coincide exactly with the facts. I do not think that what he has said alters the general proposition that to provide time for a Committee to deal with matters in an orderly fashion under a guillotine is the best way forward.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the allegation made by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) is wholly false and without foundation? Will he give the House an assurance, in relation to the details of the timetable motion, that there will be consultations with the two representatives of the minority parties, who are the only Opposition Members on the Committee who appear to know what they are doing?

Is my right hon. Friend aware that Labour Members this morning voted against allowing self-governing schools to opt back into local authorities? Does he attribute the Labour shambles on the Committee to the fact that no experienced Scottish Labour Member was interested in serving on it?

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for throwing additional light on the subject. I shall be tabling a motion later today, and there will be an adequate opportunity to discuss its terms next week.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In order to be helpful, as always, may I suggest that instead of Wednesday's guillotine motion, which is certainly unnecessary, we should have a debate on that day—3 May—about the millions of victims of 10 years of Toryism, that curse that has been inflicted on the British people? Such a debate would give us an opportunity to challenge all the phoney statistics mentioned by the Prime Minister today.

Incidentally, when the Prime Minister addresses her Cabinet, does she use the words, which she used earlier today "Now, look here"?

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman is trying to be helpful, I wonder what sort of question he asks when he is trying to be difficult. Perhaps we shall never know, for I understand that he never tries to be difficult.

The debates tabled for Wednesday—the timetable motion on the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill, and Second Reading of the Companies Bill—strike me as a very appetising bill of fare, and I am looking forward to it.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will we soon have an opportunity for a proper debate on the Green Paper on legal seryices? The Lord Chancellor is seeking views on that important issue and the other place has had a chance to express a view. Everyone seems to be able to do so except Members of this House.

Mr. Wakeham: I should like to have a debate, but I do not think that there will be an opportunity to hold it in the immediate future. However, I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor would be pleased to hear from my hon. Friend and from anybody else who wishes to express a view on the matter.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Has the Leader of the House taken note of early-day motion 541 on financial assistance for tourism?

[That this House calls on the Secretary of State for Employment to immediately reinstate schemes listed under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969, which gave financial assistance to tourism projects in England and Wales, until such time as the review currently being undertaken by Government departments is completed.]

Is he aware that in England all the grants under section 4 of the Act have been suspended but that they have not been suspended in Scotland and in Wales? Will he use the usual channels to bring this anomaly to an end and once again try to get the Government to give some sort of aid to the tourist industry?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the decision to suspend the section 4 scheme was taken at a time when investment in the tourist industry was at record levels. It would not be right to continue to spend taxpayers' money on financial assistance for the tourist industry when there are considerable doubts about the value of the scheme. A decision on its long-term future will be made in due course.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on gas prices and of the fact that it has had severe effects on two industries—the horticulture industry in the north-west and individual commercial firms? As those prices seem to have been imposed on all industrial activity in this country, will he provide time for the matter to be debated in the House?

Mr. Wakeham: Energy policy and prices in the gas industry are obviously important matters. No doubt we shall find an opportunity to return to them, but I cannot offer time to my hon. Friend in the immediate future.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Is the Leader of the House able to assist me on the Prime Minister's answer a few minutes ago, in which she suggested that I, and others, might have an opportunity to amend the British Nationality Act? Does that mean that the Cabinet will seriously consider any report on Hong Kong that is

[Mr. Jim Sillars]

published by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs? Are the Government thinking of tabling an amendment to the British Nationality Act? That would be the only chance that I could have of amending it.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman was a Member of this House long before I reached it. He has long experience of its procedures and knows what opportunities are available to him. I can think of some ways in which he could bring the matter before the House. If he has forgotten them, I suggest that he should take a refresher course. I can add no more to what was said by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, except that the Government will consider carefully any report that is published by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs after its visit to Hong Kong and China.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Does my right hon. Friend recall that more than once he has said that he sympathises with the idea of half-day debates on specific foreign affairs subjects? However, nothing has happened. All we get is late-night orders on Euro-rubbish. Will he think again about the matter and make arrangements for specific foreign affairs debates?

Mr. Wakeham: I tried, but it was not possible to meet my hon. Friend's demands in the immediate past. I was unable to get it tied up in the way that I wanted. My hon. Friend knows that the Select Committee on Procedure is looking into European matters; so is the Select Committee on European Legislation. I am holding discussions with both Committees and I hope that we shall be able to improve the way in which the House considers these important issues.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): In view of the Government's response at 3.30 this afternoon to the Select Committee on the Environment's report on toxic waste —when the Government clearly rejected the Committee's recommendation to establish an environmental protection agency, which will lead to anxiety that the Government are not concerned about environmental matters—will the Leader of the House ensure that a debate is held on that important report and the Government's response to it at the earliest possible date?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, I recognise the strength of the hon. Gentleman's question. It is an important matter to which we must return. I cannot promise an immediate debate. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will study the Government's response to the Select Committee's report with as much care as he has studied the report.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I regret my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) who asked for a debate on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That is a matter of great constitutional importance. I did not understand my right hon. Friend's reply. If there is no time for a debate on that matter, surely there must be time for an early debate on the progress that is being made towards setting up an inter-parliamentary union between Dublin and London. If not, why not?

Mr. Wakeham: I have not in any way rejected a debate on the Anglo-Irish agreement, but I cannot promise one in the immediate future. I welcome any moves to improve co-operation and understanding between our two Parliaments, and the establishment of a joint British-Irish inter-parliamentary body to discuss matters of mutual interest will be very helpful. But I should emphasise that only the first steps have been taken to agree that in principle there should be such a body and to set out its broad framework. Any debate should await further progress on that.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Is the Leader of the House aware that a 1275 statute at Westminster guarantees free elections, and the Representation of the People Act 1983 guarantees electoral registration, yet figures show that the poll tax is forcing the electoral register to collapse in Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh and other parts of the country? In view of that, can we have a debate to discuss whether the Government wish to get rid of the franchise by changing the right to vote or whether they should get rid of the poll tax to re-establish the franchise?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept for a moment the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question. Therefore his request for a debate is likely to fall on rather deaf ears. However, I recognise that he raises important issues. I wish I could arrange a time for a debate but I regret that I cannot at present.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on local government in London? Is he aware that domestic rates have increased by more than 60 per cent. in Haringey and by more than 30 per cent. in Ealing and Brent compared with increases in Conservative-controlled authorities of 7·7 per cent.? Does that not demonstrate that only Conservative councils give value for money and provide decent services?

Mr. Wakeham: I have a great deal of sympathy with my hon. Friend in wanting a debate on London matters. I hope that I can arrange such a debate in the not too distant future.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): In view of the Recruit affair in Japan, which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Takeshita, should we not examine our own organisation of recurring financial interests, have a debate on the Register of Members' Interests and consider tightening up the rules, so that, for example, people have to declare an interest at Question Time and the amount of money that lobbyists pay, mostly to Conservative Members, is also declared and that the practice whereby Members of Parliament put down many written questions at a cost of up to £200 each and get subsidised information from the taxpayer is brought to a halt? As the Leader of the House will agree, it is not fair that private organisations should be subsidised by the taxpayer through paying Members of Parliament.

Mr. Wakeham: Certainly some of the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised are a clear abuse of our procedures. It is a matter for the Select Committee that is charged with examining these matters to make any recommendations, which the House will then consider.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend find a time for a major debate on local government finance so that we can underline the strengthening case for the introduction of the community charge, particularly in Nottinghamshire, and draw the attention of a wider public

to the dramatic and appalling consequences were the Labour party to introduce its new two-tax system for local government, which would adversely affect ordinary folk on average incomes in my constituency?

Mr. Wakeham: I hear what my hon. Friend says and I recognise the strength of his argument. Unfortunately, I have yet to see the precise details of any alternative form of local government finance that the Opposition may propose. Therefore I cannot comment on the specific point he raised. However, the Government are convinced that the community charge is the fairest means of raising a contribution from local residents for the provision of local services.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Is the Leader of the House aware that many hon. Members would like to have a look in the Chamber at the Government's proposals for selling Girobank at the knock-down price of £130 million to the Alliance and Leicester building society? When the final details of the sale have been hammered out, will he arrange for a statement to be made in the House and not leave details in the announcement to be slipped out in the form of a written answer to an unheard of Conservative Member, as happened last week? Is he aware that there is great concern about the 6,000 jobs at Girobank in Bootle and is he aware that no assurances have been given by the Government that the sale will safeguard those jobs? Surely such a major privatisation proposal, which is a failure because the bank has been sold at a knock-down price and the taxpayers are suffering, should be the subject of a statement in the House so that we can question the Minister concerned, especially as legislation was not required for the privatisation?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman has a constituency interest in the matter, so it behoves him not to put his question in an explosive and extreme fashion that would cause unnecessary fear. I recognise his concern, but I do not accept his premise that the business is being sold at a knock-down price. I will refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and see what can be done.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): With regard to the timetable motion proposed for the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill next Wednesday, may I urge my hon. Friend not to be over-generous with the time necessary because, as those of us who have served in Committee thus far have seen, the Labour party does not want to debate the real issues? Is my right hon. Friend aware that just an hour ago I did a radio interview for BBC Scotland and the Labour party refused to debate with me on that programme? It is clear that my right hon. Friend does not need to be over-generous. Clearly, the Labour party does not want to debate the Bill in the House, in Committee or even through the media.

Mr. Wakeham: In my timetable motion I am seeking to provide adequate time for proper consideration of the outstanding parts of the Bill. I expect that Opposition Members will criticise the motion for not giving enough time and if my hon. Friend catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, he may be able to make his point in the debate.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Are these exchanges about the Government's latest proposal to disrupt education in Scotland not proof positive that such legislation should be considered in a directly elected Scottish Parliament, unencumbered by hon. Members from Gainsborough and Horncastle, Brigg and Cleethorpes or anywhere else south of the border? Will the Leader of the House let us into a secret? Was the guillotine proposal discussed in Committee Room 11 late on Tuesday night when Tory members of the Committee—English and otherwise—were apparently joined by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) over a bottle of champagne? Were such discussions——

Mr. Michael Brown: It was Room 12.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am grateful for that correction. Were such discussions wholly consistent with the Scottish National party's intentions to disrupt progress on the Bill?

Mr. Wakeham: If glassess of champagne were going, I wish that the hon. Gentleman had told me about it beforehand, rather than afterwards.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Was the right hon. Gentleman discussing tactics with her?

Mr. Wakeham: It is hardly likely that I can give a report of a meeting at which champagne was drunk when I did not know about the champagne. I am less than likely to know what happened at the meeting. All I can say is that this is a unitary Parliament and Conservative Members did not complain when the Labour Government used their Scottish majority to timetable the 1976 Education Bill, which severely damaged education in England and Wales. I see no reason why Scottish Members should complain that we are using our English majority to improve Scottish education for the Scottish people.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that some of us who served in Committee are teetotal and that, therefore, if champagne was going around, we were unable to participate? However, is my right hon. Friend aware that the reason why we were debating late at night was that the Labour party was so badly organised that it did not know how to handle matters when the Government said that they accepted Opposition amendments in principle, but believed that they were flawed and would have to be brought back on Report in a manner that was more acceptable? In addition, the Government accepted amendments, yet Opposition Members kept the Committee sitting for hours discussing matters that could have been dealt with quickly. We were, therefore, unable to get on with matters that should have been dealt with. That is why the guillotine is necessary.

Mr. Wakeham: No one has greater admiration for my hon. Friend than I do but I sometimes find that he is not the most unbiased observer of the scene in Committee. However, I have heard what he says and I look forward to the debate next week.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate before the Madrid summit on proposals currently before the European Community? If the proposals really do represent such an important new initiative and a departure for the Community, and if their constitutional implications are so considerable—both of which propositions are true—surely hon. Members of all shades of opinion should have an opportunity to express their views.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend raises an important matter. I cannot promise him in specific terms the debate for which he has asked but we shall seek an opportunity of discussing those important matters when we have the time.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I give an unreserved and genuine welcome to the fact that the Prime Minister held a seminar on global climatology yesterday? Possibly next week may we have an answer to the question that was put by the chiefs of the Kayaipo people who were in the Gallery earlier this afternoon, Megaron and Pai-ikani, who were seen by you, Mr. Speaker, and who are serious men whose forests——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question about business for next week.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Leader of the House tell me what the Government are going to do as a result of the seminar and other discussions about the rain forests? Will the Leader of the House persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer—*[Interruption.]* This is a very important subject. Will the right hon. Gentleman persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer to tell Parliament what instructions are being given to the British director of the World Bank on these delicate and sensitive issues?

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for the seminar held by by right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Downing street yesterday. It enabled her and other Ministers to hear at first hand the opinions and advice of some of the foremost experts on climate change. Although there are many uncertainties about climate change, and especially about its effects on particular regions and countries, there was a consensus that measures such as the use of non-fossil fuels as an energy source, more efficient use of energy, better forestry practice and the phasing out of CFCs all have roles to play in ensuring the success of international measures. It was a successful seminar.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend will have heard earlier that one of our honourable colleagues was protesting about the length of time that it has taken to hold debates on the European Parliament and I have to agree, but only to the extent that, to my knowledge, we have never discussed in this House two other important European institutions, the Council of Europe and Western European Union. May I remind my right hon. Friend that it is the 40th anniversary of the Council of Europe in May and that Finland is joining the council of Europe in May, which will then comprise 23 countries and be almost twice the size of the European Parliament? In addition, Western European Union has recently been joined by two other countries, Spain and Portugal, making nine countries in all and making it very much a part of the burden-sharing for NATO defences, yet to my knowledge there has never been any time set aside, either by the Opposition, who should be interested in this, or by the Government to discuss some of its important documents, especially that on transfrontier television satellite broadcasting which, as my right hon. Friend knows, our Government picked up in its entirety. Will my right hon. Friend give a little time to those two important institutions?

Mr. Wakeham: I would like to be able to because it would enable my colleagues at the Dispatch Box to pay tribute to my hon. Friend and others who have served on those important institutions. As I am having enough difficulty in finding time for foreign affairs debates and for debates on European matters, I cannot be too optimistic about a special debate on the subject that my hon. Friend has raised. However, as several of the subjects that those bodies have considered come up under other guises, I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to contribute to those debates.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Does my right hon. Friend think that it might be helpful to arrange a debate on industrial relations bearing in mind the likelihood of a dock strike? Would this be a suitable opportunity to find out what Labour's policy really is? Some of us cannot quite believe that it can be that enunciated by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who said that it would enthusiastically support such a strike.

Mr. Wakeham: I can see that that would be a useful debate and we might learn something. On the other hand, we might not. I wish that I could find time for it, but I cannot just at the moment.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Can I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 767, which calls for a debate next week on the very urgent matter of the proposed strike by London Underground from 8 May bearing in mind the serious inconvenience to Londoners that this will cause, as well as the great damage to London's economy that will ensue?

[That this House strongly deplores the proposed all out strike of London Underground staff from 8th May with the severe inconvenience and suffering it will cause for the London public and the economy of London; and urges all concerned to think again and to continue to try to resolve their problems round the negotiating table, remembering that no problem is too large to be insoluble by responsible and fair negotiations.]

Will he give the House an opportunity to discuss all aspects of the whole problem of London Underground manning and services, but particularly this most unwanted strike over a matter which could, I am sure, be solved with good will on both sides?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend. I certainly welcome his motion and regret that the Underground station staff have decided to pursue their grievances through industrial action rather than negotiations. The resolution of this dispute is, of course, a matter for the board and management of London Underground Ltd. I regret that I do not see myself being able to find time for a debate in the immediate future but I very much hope that negotiations will be resumed and the matter resolved.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the announcement which he has made today about the guillotine motion in respect of the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill will have come as the greatest relief to the Scottish Labour party, whose members have been knocked all about the ring by my hon. Friend the Minister in the Standing Committee and whose incompetence and lack of convincing argument have been daily increasingly exposed to the Scottish people? If any evidence of this were necessary, at the moment there is not a single Labour member of that Committee in the Chamber.

Mr. Wakeham: I expect there will be on Wednesday when we discuss the matter and I think we had better keep these matters for discussion on that occasion.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): As another member of the Committee on the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill, may I assure my right hon. Friend that the hours were long and the allocations of champagne that have been referred to extremely modest? In fact, his timetable motion is a kindness to members of the Labour party in Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) rightly says, they are simply not present in the Chamber at the moment. It would be a kindness to them to get them out of the confusion and chaos into which they have sunk.

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his generous words to the Opposition.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Does the Leader of the House agree that the contribution by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) merely illustrates the desperate straits to which the Labour party has reduced the Committee? Will he take up the suggestion by his hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) regarding consultation with the minority parties? Will he consult with the Committee of Selection about discharging the Labour party members for their incompetence and let the rest of us have a sensible discussion on these matters?

Mr. Wakeham: I am all for consultation and discussion and I will see to it that the hon. Gentleman is consulted.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

1. Security Service Act 1989.
2. British Railways Act 1989.

Points of Order

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising out of Question Time. No doubt you too were depressed by the Scottish wrangle during Business Questions. May I lift your spirits by asking again whether you have any further guidance after the slight confusion at Question Time on Tuesday and also today, when maybe other hon. Members were, like myself, further bemused when you selected a questioner who was not rising to his feet to put a question? On the assumption that you are not now in the process of developing new metaphysical forms of questioner selection—and I appreciate the difficulties in the Chair—can I ask your guidance as to our reversion to normal practices?

Mr. Speaker: I made a mistake on Tuesday. We were proceeding rather rapidly. There was a good deal of confusion, and I called an hon. Member out of sequence. It is difficult when dozens of hon. Members are rising. A list is kept of hon. Members who are rising. The hon. Member whom I called today was rising, but he did not get to his feet as rapidly as I had expected.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): At columns 967 and 968 of yesterday's *Hansard*, I referred to a question involving the clearance or otherwise by Downing street of Sir Leon Brittan's——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this the matter which the hon. Member raised yesterday? I am considering the matter and I will write to him. I think that he knows that. I have not yet been able to do so.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR MONDAY 15 MAY

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Andrew Mitchell
Mr. Michael Colvin
Mr. John Butterfill

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That the proposals described in the unnumbered explanatory memoranda submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 15th and 27th October 1987 and 25th November 1987 on negotiations between the European Community and Japan under GATT Article XXIV.6, on 15th October 1987 on such negotiations with Argentina and on 21st March 1989 on such negotiations with Canada be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C.

Ordered,

That the draft Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) Order 1989 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Preservatives in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 581) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Orders of the Day

Children Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Social Services Committee of Session 1983-84 on Children in Care (HC 360-I), Government Response thereto (Cmnd. 9298) and Second Report from the Social Services Committee of Session 1988-89 on the Children Bill (HC 178) .]

Mr. Speaker: A large number of hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. I therefore propose to apply a limit of 10 minutes to speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. I hope that hon. Members who may be called before that time will bear that limit broadly in mind.

4.21 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am particularly pleased to be able to introduce to the House, following its successful passage through the other place, such an important and keenly awaited Bill—a Bill which is the most comprehensive and far-reaching reform of child law to have come before Parliament in living memory. I am delighted that the House is so well filled for this occasion.

It is a Bill motivated by our overriding concern to put in place an effective legislative framework to ensure the welfare of children. At present, children's legislation is confusing, piecemeal, outdated, often unfair and, in important respects, ineffective—most notably when it comes to our ability to protect children at risk. The Social Services Committee's report entitled "Children in Care" in the 1983-84 Session recognised that, and recommended the thoroughgoing review of the body of statute law concerning children which, in turn, led to our 1987 White Paper entitled "The Law on Child Care and Family Services".

This Bill follows directly from that White Paper, but it has been reviewed and revised in the light of Lord Justice Butler-Sloss's report on events in Cleveland and, of course, in the light of other comments that have been made both within and outside the House. It also integrates the private and public law relating to children into a single rationalised system, as recommended by the committee, and it now incorporates the reforms of guardianship and custody recommended by the Law Commission. It also bears upon private and public law. I am glad to have the assistance of my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General during the debate, and I hope that that will be to the advantage of the House.

As I hope I made clear, we have high ambitions for this Bill. We hope and believe that it will bring order, integration, relevance and a better balance to the law—a better balance not just between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and agencies, but, most vitally, between the need to protect children and the need to enable parents to challenge intervention in the upbringing of their children. Recent well-publicised cases, including the tragic cases of Kimberley Carlile, Doreen Mason and the events in Cleveland in 1987, have graphically shown the consequences of getting that balance wrong. Of course, of itself, legislation cannot stop

such tragedies, but we hope that a clear legal framework will help to make more likely clear-eyed judgments by key people involved in child welfare, whether they are in social services departments, health authorities, the police, education or the courts.

So, as I have said, the Bill is first and foremost an attempt to establish a unified and consistent code of law covering the care and upbringing of children in both the private and public domains. We aim to provide a comprehensive and comprehensible framework of powers and responsibilities that we hope will secure our central goal, which I think would be the central goal of all of us, that children receive the care, upbringing and protection that they deserve.

Two basic principles run through the Bill. First, there is an improved statement of the welfare principle governing court decisions in respect of children; that is, the child's welfare must be the paramount consideration. All courts in reaching all decisions about the care and upbringing of children must do what is best for the child. Secondly, we are proposing major reforms of the law governing parental responsibility, guardianship and the court's powers to make orders in respect of children in family proceedings. The Bill's emphasis on the primary function of parenthood will, we hope, sharpen our perceptions and highlight the obligation on parents to care for their children and bring them up properly.

The first parts of the Bill deal with new provisions in private law. New orders are introduced to reflect our emphasis on encouraging parents to participate fully in the child's upbringing.

Much of the remainder of the Bill deals with our proposed reform of the public law on children. It follows, as I have already said, the guiding principles set out in our 1987 White Paper. First, parents should be responsible for bringing up their children, but local authorities and other agencies should be ready to help when this reduces the risk of family breakdown. Secondly, such services should be provided in voluntary partnership with parents and in a way that promotes family relationships as fully as possible.

Thirdly, a transfer of the parents' responsibility for caring for a child to a local authority should require a court order following due legal process and the court being satisfied that that is in the interests of the child. Fourthly, in such proceedings parents and children should have full party status and representation. Fifthly, emergency powers to remove a child at serious immediate risk should be of short duration and subject to court review if challenged. Sixthly, where local authorities are caring for a child away from home, their powers and responsibilities, and those of the child's parents in those circumstances, should be clear-cut.

In clarifying and improving child care law in line with these principles, the Bill has a number of key provisions. It rationalises local authorities' responsibilities towards children in need, including disabled children and their families. It proposes fairer court procedures for parents and children, improved rights of access to children in care and clarification of local authorities' responsibilities to children they look after.

A vital part of striking the right balance is the introduction of a new emergency protection order to replace the present place of safety order. This will give those with parental responsibility a right to challenge the order, and power for the court to give directions on access and medical examinations.

We also aim to restrict the use of wardship as a means of giving local authorities compulsory powers over a child. In regard to court jurisdiction, the Bill outlines arrangements for child care cases to be heard at the level of court appropriate to the complexity of the case.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): In the opening passages of his speech the Minister has been talking, understandably, in terms of children and parents. He has not made any reference so far to the rights of grandparents. Will he address himself to that aspect?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I can satisfy him later when I make it clear that there will be a broader definition of party status in the proceedings than children and their parents. If he will bear with me, I shall come to that point; I acknowledge that it is significant.

It is a complex Bill. So as not to outstay my welcome and so that as many hon. Members as possible may make a contribution, I hope to provide in a limited period a clear account of the Bill's main aspects. Obviously, in a sensible time scale I shall not be able to cover all the details, which is why I look forward, as does my hon. and learned Friend, to careful consideration of the Bill in Committee.

I need hardly say that I hope and believe that the constructive and non-partisan approach which marked the Bill's passage in the other place will be repeated here. I have great respect for the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who leads for the Opposition on these issues. I hope that we shall have a happy passage of the Bill, without in any way diminishing the critical scrutiny given to it. I should like to make it clear that we shall be receptive to contributions and we shall not hesitate to make changes if they appear right. The Bill was improved during its passage through the Lords and I dare say that there is room for further improvement here.

From the general reception that the Bill has received, I am encouraged to hope that we have struck something like the right note. Inevitably, a number of outside organisations are still suggesting amendments. We shall come to those in due course. I hope that, when we have finally done our work in the House, we shall have played a part in the passage of a piece of legislation that can be hailed as a landmark of social legislation in this country. That should be our aim, because Parliament will not return to the issue for a long time. The Bill will be an important and significant milestone that may point the way for many years to come.

There is one representation that I know concerns a number of hon. Members; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) raised it with me privately this afternoon. I believe that it would assist if I were to say that a number of hon. Members wrote to me following representations from the Church of England Children's Society concerning services for runaways. I am happy to confirm the Lord Chancellor's undertaking that an amendment will be tabled at a later stage to give effect to the proposal in the White Paper that organisations temporarily looking after children who have run away could be specified and then exempted from liability for the offence of harbouring in defined circumstances. I hope that that meets the point. Those who have written will be delighted to know that they have not written in vain. I hope that that shows the kind of spirit in which we shall approach these matters.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for that assurance. Of course, a limited number of organisations will fit the bill, and those which are exempted will need specifying carefully. Will my hon. Friend give his assurance of that, too?

Mr. Mellor: That is why I said that we shall want to define the circumstances clearly. I shall look forward to assistance from my colleagues on the Committee in ensuring that we get that right in the amendment.

In the Bill, we have set down in outline a new scheme of concurrent jurisdiction for all children's proceedings. I am afraid, however, that in that respect the Bill still lacks some final details; indeed, there are one or two other provisions that have been sought that I believe will be welcomed but that we have not as yet been able to add to the Bill. That is partly attributable to the fast pace that we set ourselves following Cleveland and partly to the prolonged indisposition of the senior parliamentary draftsman, who has done such good work on the Bill. I assure the House that we shall bring forward the remaining matters in good time for there to be a full discussion on all of them in Committee and on Report.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): On the point of concurrent jurisdiction and clause 67, why did the Government not think it appropriate to introduce a clause setting up a family court?

Mr. Mellor: This is a reform of the law relating to children, and is not intended to be a reform of the legal structure. The hon. Gentleman will have noted that there are provisions that allow for reallocation of cases from one court to another, which, as he knows as an experienced lawyer, is not possible under the present arrangement. One authority has said that that is the family court in embryo. It is for others to say whether that is a fair description. There are changes to the mechanism from which I believe those who are in favour of family courts could take some comfort.

This is already a bulky Bill. It is a major reform of the substantive law. It is not intended to be a reform of the legal structure. I appreciate that many hon. Members in all parts of the House want to see a change in the legal structure. I do not believe that the Bill gives them any discouragement; I could say that it gives them some encouragement.

Without more ado, I shall give a brief account of some of the principal aspects of the Bill, which I hope will help the House. Parts I and II deal with the private law, on which my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General is the authority. They establish the general welfare principle, to which I have already adverted. The requirement is that the child's welfare should be the paramount consideration. Following on from that, all orders about children should be made only if they contribute positively to the child's welfare.

Clauses 2 and 3 bring up to date and elucidate the nature and incidence of parental responsibility. A parental responsibility order in clause 4 repeats the existing law in enabling a father of an illegitimate child to achieve full parental status and also allows the mother and the father to achieve the same effect by formal agreement without recourse to the courts. That is a helpful change. Clause 5 also makes some significant changes to the law on guardianship.

Part II of the Bill introduces four new orders relating to children—the residence order, the contact order, the specific issues order and the prohibited steps order. They replace the present orders for custody, legal custody, care and control and access that are on the statute book. The new orders will seek to concentrate the minds of the parties and of the courts on the concrete issues relating to the day-to-day care of the child. They are designed to encourage parents to continue to participate fully in the child's upbringing, subject only to any particular matter provided for by a court order.

We hope that the new orders will be found more approachable and more workable than the present arrangements. We also propose changes in deciding who may apply for orders, which relates to a point that was made earlier. In general, anyone who has parental responsibility for the child may apply for any order as of right. The court, whether prompted or not, may itself make any of the orders in family proceedings if it thinks fit, save where there is a local authority involved.

Clause 10 adopts a general presumption that delay in deciding children's cases prejudices a child's welfare and provides for the courts to draw up timetables and to give directions to ensure that they are kept to. Those of us who have been in the law as well as those who have not—it is not a well-kept secret—know that delay is endemic in our system. The Bill means to ensure that there is no delay in vital matters affecting children. Finally, clause 14 introduces a new order, the family assistance order, allowing a court welfare officer to advise, assist and befriend any member or members of the family taking account of the interests of the child. It replaces the existing family proceedings supervision order.

Let us consider the public provision—the public law. If any one issue makes this legislation necessary and urgent, it is the need to ensure that the most vulnerable children are not let down by indecision—that is, a failure to act when the signs of abuse are there, or, of course, by sanctioning over-zealous interference. We want to ensure that, as Lord Justice Butler-Sloss counselled in her report, the child is always treated as a person and not just as an object of concern.

Part III and schedule 2 deal with the powers of local authorities to promote the welfare of children and to help prevent family breakdown. We believe that their provisions will improve and consolidate the present law. I want to stress the emphasis in the provisions on the family, preventive work and voluntary partnership. Local authorities will have a new duty to promote the upbringing of children in need by their families, so far as this is consistent with their welfare duty to the child himself.

Among the services which will be picked out for the first time as having to be provided by local authorities on such a scale as they consider appropriate—we think that it is a matter for them—in order to discharge their general duty to children in need and their families is day care for under-fives. We are considering a proposal from the other place that local authorities should keep under review the provision of such facilities, consulting, of course, the local education authority. We intend to strengthen what is at present a power of local authorities in clause 16 to provide care and supervised activities for older children outside school hours.

Part III also clarifies the responsibility of local authorities in relation to the children they are looking after, whether under voluntary arrangements or as a result

of compulsory care proceedings. The local authority will have an absolute duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child looked after by it, to review his needs at specified intervals, to promote contact between the child and his family and to consult the family on decisions. It will also have to establish a procedure with an independent element for considering complaints. I hope that those are in line with the common-sense views of hon. Members in all parts of the House.

Local authorities will also have enhanced responsibilities for preparing children they are looking after for when they leave care, and for helping them and other children who are accommodated away from home at the age of 16 after they leave that accommodation. We cannot, however, go as far as the Social Services Committee would like by requiring local authorities to provide assistance, including cash help for care leavers, which would duplicate provision under the social security system. That is because of the improvements that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced recently in benefit arrangements for 16 and 17-year-olds who are living independently. That matter is being kept under review by the Department of Social Security.

Let me turn, without further ado, to what are perhaps the most vital parts of the Bill—parts IV and V. Part IV makes major reforms in the processes for compulsory intervention in the care and upbringing of children. A court order under the statutory scheme will in future always be required. New grounds for care and supervision orders will focus on significant harm to the child, including the likelihood of such harm, and will apply in family proceedings as well as in care proceedings. Where anticipated harm is the issue, the new grounds will make it unnecessary for local authorities to continue to resort to wardship.

Rules of court will give effect to the White Paper undertaking that any person, including the child, whose legal position could be affected by the proceedings will be entitled to party status. I am happy to tell the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) that this will include those grandparents who wish to retain or take over care of a child. Parents will now be able to obtain full party status without the need for the court to rule that the child and his parents should be separately represented. The present position on legal representation of the child will be maintained, and arrangements will be made to speed the granting of legal aid to parties in care proceedings. We shall also provide for appeal rights, advance disclosure of documents, access to records, and so on, in line with the White Paper.

I hope that this shows that we have responded to points that have been made to us. This is a practical Bill. It is not full of rhetorical flourishes, but is full of the practical experience of those who have appeared in the courts and know the practical difficulties that arise in these cases.

Part IV also makes it clear that the effect of a care order is to give parental responsibility for the child to the local authority looking after him. On parental access to children in care, we are putting right the present legislation by providing that the court can make an order about contact, whether or not contact has been stopped or prevented—at the moment, the only circumstances in which a court may intervene. We think that that is an arbitrary restriction, which should be removed. A further major improvement is that a guardian ad litem will have to be appointed by the court to safeguard the child's interests in all care proceedings, including those arising in family proceedings, unless—we regard this as an exceptional circumstance—the court considers such an appointment unnecessary. At present, appointments are made only where there is a conflict of interest between the child and the parents. We say that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, a guardian ad litem should be appointed right from the outset.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): One of the concerns expressed to me by people practising in this area arises from the fact that guardians ad litem will have to be appointed on day one. At present, it often takes two months before they become available. Will the Minister ensure that there are sufficiently trained people? Those people will be drawn mostly from the ranks of social workers. Their ranks will be diminished and will therefore have to be replenished before the Bill is brought into operation so that there is not a gap between what the law requires and what a local authority can provide.

Mr. Mellor: Indeed, we have proposed changes. The hon. Gentleman might like to cast his eye over them and let me know whether he thinks they meet the concerns. Actually, we propose some quite significant changes in the administration and management of panels of guardians ad litem, because there has been some criticism as to whether the fact that a guardian ad litem is drawn from a local authority that might be concerned with the matter leads to a conflict of interests.

That is why the Bill provides that the Secretary of State will have power to require, in regulations, that panels be based on groupings of authorities. That will be building on existing co-operative experience in some areas. We hope that the distancing of panel management from individual authorities will reduce the risk of conflict. Obviously, training and having the machine ready to move into operation will be of the essence. I hope that we have got that right.

The major reforms to the statutory framework for the emergency protection of children—of all issues, perhaps the most central in the minds of most of us—are contained in part V. As the House knows, the key reform is a new emergency protection order limited to a maximum of eight days, but extendable by the court to up to 15 days. It will be challengeable after 72 hours where the application was made ex parte, or even earlier if the court decides that only a very short order should be made. That will replace the present place of safety order, which can run for up to 28 days without the parents or the child having any opportunity to challenge it while it is in force. That is one of the lessons learned from Cleveland.

The grounds will for the first time address the emergency nature of the situation and the need to remove the child, or to continue to keep the child in a safe place, in order to protect it. The holder of the order, who will usually be a local authority social worker or officer of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—whose quality and status we accept—is given parental responsibility for the child and required to take such action, but only such action, as is needed to protect the child while the order is in force. That includes not removing him from home if it is not necessary to do so, or returning him as soon as it is safe to do so.

The court will also be able to give directions when the order is made, or at any time while it is in force, about medical examination and contact with the child—again,

[Mr. Mellor]

issues of particular difficulty in Cleveland, as we all recall. As at present, the order, when resisted, will be enforceable by a constable acting under a warrant, and police powers to order a child into protection will complement the new order. The local authority's duty to investigate cases of possible significant harm will be made more positive and other agencies will be required to co-operate in such investigations, as was recommended in the report on the tragic death of Jasmine Beckford. I am glad that the Social Services Committee, the Association of Directors of Social Services and, indeed, Lord Justice Butler-Sloss have endorsed those provisions.

Let me deal now with a matter of concern to, I suspect, a number of hon. Members—a concern which was expressed in the other place and by the NSPCC. Welcome as the changes are to all, they may not deal with cases where there is serious but not urgent concern about a child who cannot be seen, and a separate medical assessment order may be needed for such cases. I am anxious to meet those concerns.

One solution which has been discussed with the NSPCC and the Association of Directors of Social Services is to make it clear in the Bill that the authority's investigative duty will include a duty to try to see the child, and that an unreasonable refusal of access to a child, which prevents the authority or others acting on its behalf from completing the investigation, will also be a ground for an emergency protection order.

Another way would be to go for a separate child assessment order, as was suggested in the Kimberley Carlile report. I am sure that there is a potential problem here in relation to the production of a child, but I have refrained from seeking to determine that issue until I have had the opportunity to hear hon. Members' views. We all need to be satisfied that the mechanisms proposed are sufficient to ensure proper protection for the child.

I look forward to hearing hon. Members' views on the proposals which, clearly, we must get right as the Bill progresses through the House. I cannot think of a more important matter for us to get right. I undertake to take hon. Members' views fully into account and I shall not hesitate to make changes—including, if necessary, the introduction of a child assessment order—if that in the end seems to be the right answer. I shall come to no conclusion on that until I have heard the views of others.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Will my hon. and learned Friend bear in mind the concern of many hon. Members that a large number of social workers are young and have not had the experience to know when a person is lying? When a mother says that her child is down at gran's, round at Auntie Mary's or playing outside, young social workers are placed in extreme difficulty, and their difficulty will be the need to recognise that.

Mr. Mellor: I agree. As well as the inevitable apportioning of blame when things go wrong, we have a duty to try to ensure that we help people to get things right. That is why we must have a modern, comprehensible legal framework and proper training.

Since Cleveland, we have made available a substantial grant of £7 million to back £10 million of total expenditure for training social workers. Through the area committees, which bring in all the different agencies, we have laid stress on inter-agency co-operation, which should help people in vulnerable positions to obtain the assistance they need to make the right decision. I am in no doubt that my hon. Friend is right, and we all have a duty to make things better.

Mr. Vaz: I agree with the Minister that this is an important clause, but does he not agree with me that, as it is such an important clause, the Government should have spelt out in the Bill itself to whom notice should be given when the child is removed? Under clause 42, the Government reserve the ability to make rules at a later date. Surely the Minister agrees with me that these very important matters must be in the Bill.

Mr. Mellor: I am not so sure that I do agree, because if rules are made and do not actually meet the technical point, they can be remade, whereas changing primary legislation is not easy. What the hon. Gentleman has raised is a perfectly legitimate Committee point. If, as I hope, the hon. Gentleman serves on the Committee, he can come to that point then.

Parts VI to IX of the Bill deal with community homes, voluntary homes and voluntary organisations. I pass over those points briefly because of the pressure of time, but we will come to them in Committee. In part XI, clause 64 is significant. It provides for the abolition of care orders as a disposal in juvenile criminal proceedings. People who follow these matters realise the significance of that provision, but I shall not go into it in greater detail now.

I have already referred to court jurisdiction. I add to what I said earlier in response the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) who spoke about the family court: what we intend is that care jurisdiction in magistrates courts should be transferred from the juvenile court to what is now the domestic magistrates court so that care cases will be heard by those magistrates who also hear other domestic and family matters. So "domestic panels" will be called "family panels" from now on. Care cases will start before the magistrates, except where related proceedings are already in existence. Criteria will be prescribed and machinery provided to identify cases which need to be heard by superior courts. Already, the President of the Family Division and others are engaged in the machinery for concurrent jurisdiction, and that will obviously take some time.

More generally, the powers to provide for the transfer of cases between courts and tiers of court will be used to enable proceedings concerning the same child and his family to be consolidated, and to avoid unnecessary delay or to expedite cases where the courts they are in are not able to hear the cases immediately or within a reasonable time. If experience shows that more cases need to be transferred up, there is power under the Bill to adjust the scheme and, if necessary, to allow cases to start at a higher level. This is the beginning of the machinery to move family cases around in a coherent way, which I hope will give some comfort to those who have argued for a family court.

The intention of clause 69 is to prevent local authorities from using the High Court's inherent jurisdiction, including wardship, as an alternative to a care or supervision order or as a means of their otherwise obtaining compulsory powers over children. We say that the inherent power remains available to cover circumstances not provided for in statute, but it is not to be available

as an alternative to care and supervision which is obtained in the normal way. We believe that this will represent a better use of the resources of the superior courts.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I, for one, as a Cleveland MP, would be very anxious if wardship should disappear completely, because it was the one way in which we could get families out of the magistrates courts and away from junior courts into the High Court, where these often very delicate, complicated and heart-rending matters can be dealt with properly by a judge. I would like to see wardship continue as a reserve power, not just for the small minority of cases but for all cases because, as I will say later, I am not satisfied to see some of these matters dealt with at junior level by individual collections of magistrates.

Mr. Mellor: I will listen with interest to what my hon. Friend says later. I know about the experiences that he and one or two of his colleagues went through at Cleveland. We must look at this provision in the light not of the old mechanism but of the new law and mechanisms I have described. Obviously, if my hon. Friend continues to have reservations, we shall have to look carefully at what he says.

We hope that the Bill introduces a simplified and coherent body of law comprehensible not only to those operating it but also to those affected by its operations. We are committed to safeguarding the interests of all our children. We are trying to take a firm lead by setting the overall framework in this Bill, but we have drawn on the thinking of others, the recent report of the Social Services Committee, and so on. We have been grateful for the very approving noises coming from most bodies that have already considered the Bill, which raises important and sensitive issues which must be considered carefully. In no sense do we resent that level of detailed scrutiny.

The noble Lord Mishcon, who leads for the Opposition in another place on this matter, called the Bill a children's charter, and I am happy to adopt that description. It is a charter of rights of children to have their welfare regarded as a primary concern. It must be a basic right of children in a civilised community to grow up without being abused. It must be a responsibility on all of us to step in and prevent that abuse when it happens, as we know it will and as it always has. We know that it happens too much today. We want to do something effective about it, and we are all united in that endeavour. I look forward to everyone involved working together to give effect to these rights. The welfare of children must remain the highest law for the public, as well as for the Government.

4.58 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): As the Minister has said, we have been helped by the fact that the Bill has been considered in another place, although that is not to say that the noble Lords got it exactly right, as we do not believe they did. We shall be raising a number of issues that have been pursued in another place by my noble Friends and other noble Lords. They must be greatly disappointed that, despite the superiority of their argument, they failed to persuade the Lord Chancellor on such matters as physical punishment in care, and only just persuaded him on the need for a helpful and practical approach to young people needing care. Here we have a chance to deal with that scandal and we shall seek to do it.

At the outset, I want to ask the Minister about implementation. What are the Government's priorities? Will the Bill, as many fear, be implemented, as was previous legislation, in dribs and drabs? Surely the evidence is overwhelming that there should be no delay after all stages are completed, as the need for action is great indeed. This Bill has a substantial history of heartbreaking cases, interdepartmental reports, consultation papers, the report by Louis Blom-Cooper on the tragedy of little Kimberley Carlile, a report by a Lord Justice of Appeal on the Cleveland cases, a Government White Paper, and a Law Commission report. Against that background, we are now on Second Reading of the Bill in this place.

The Bill is a welcome if belated measure that aims to resolve a wide variety of family issues about child care, parental responsibilities, social work practice, and laws governing family life.

The Bill deals admirably with many matters, but with others less so, and some aspects have been woefully neglected. We applaud the Bill's intention to simplify and consolidate much legislation in a form that will meet the approval of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House, yet we remain deeply disturbed about the Government's reluctance to introduce what would have been—despite the Minister's comments this afternoon—the most imaginative, far-reaching and positive reform in post-war child care legislation. I refer to the family court.

The Government did not lack encouragement for making such a reform, which was clearly recommended by Lord Justice Butler-Sloss in her report on the Cleveland child abuse inquiry. A family court is urgently needed so that the delicate realm of family problems—which some courts today manage with less than speedy and wholly expert resolution—may be dealt with specifically, swiftly and expertly.

We endorse the Government's recognition of the crucial years of childhood and of the importance of supporting families in need. We remain concerned about the Government's unwillingness adequately to fund effective preventive services and clearly to instruct local government to provide them. Clause 16 does not increase the priority given to day care for children, which is not a luxury but a sensible and essential resource that can help the family and prevent the strains and breakdowns that are so costly both in human and in material terms.

Only one quarter of three and four-year-olds have either a full-time or part-time nursery place. We need more and better-regulated nurseries, child minders and other specialist day care services. Day care does not undermine family responsibility but allows the family the space and support that it often needs to make the family a happy and healthy unit.

The Bill leaves it to the discretion of local authorities to define and deliver what they consider to be adequate day care. We believe that local authorities need fair criteria for the provision of day care, so that the service encompasses not only families in crisis but all parents who would cope better with their family responsibilities and play their full economic role if a properly funded day care service existed.

It is a matter of major concern to us that the Government show no sign of introducing better regulation on the licensing and training of day care providers in the private sector. Instead, there is talk of the Government deregulating that sector in respect of day care for children aged over five years. However, day care as we know it is

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

not only about infants but is a crucial service for school age children in families needing support when schooling is not available.

Children and youngsters should not be placed in the care of people and places that have not been properly inspected. We cannot expect parents to be the only or even the best judge of the competence and quality of carers in a deregulated private sector. We hope to persuade the Government to consider that aspect again. I look forward to hearing later from my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), who hopes to speak on that subject in more detail.

We welcome the Government's intention in clause 20 to address the needs of the 12,000 children who leave care at age 18 or thereabouts. Youngsters leaving home face a difficult time, but it is made especially traumatic for young people who have no family or parents to fall back on. We are astonished that the Government will not ensure that that group will enjoy the same level of social security as young people aged 25, who receive the full adult rate. Youngsters aged 18 who have no family and who leave care are as much in need, if not more so, of the higher adult level of benefit that their older peers receive when they are assumed to be independent of kith and kin.

The scandal of the young homeless, especially in big cities, shocks many—including Barnardo's and Shelter, which estimate that there are 150,000 young homeless. The number grows, but no solution is yet in sight. The need for more resources, more support and the growing outrage at so many young lives being wasted must be recognised by the House. Many organisations help those young people, but they are overwhelmed by their numbers and are hampered by legislation. I welcome the Minister's announcement about an amendment, which we shall examine in detail, concerning runaway youngsters. Those youngsters are estranged from their parents for various reasons and live on the streets, with all the dangers that entails. They need support and security, and time to solve their problems. The Minister accepts that, and we welcome the tone of his comments this afternoon.

Organisations that seek to help such youngsters will be acting illegally if they do not immediately notify those youngsters' whereabouts. Often, they need a little time to talk about their difficulties—and they must be sure that those helping them will not promptly be asked to return those youngsters to the people from whom they have run away. The Church of England Children's Society informs me that the law hinders its efforts to reunite children and adolescents with their families and to find them a safe place while they sort themselves out. In view of the Minister's announcement about an amendment, I hope that the House agrees that that is an area in which it can assist, by providing a necessary and lawful breathing space for helpers and for the hurt and unhappy youngsters concerned. My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), and others of my right hon. and hon. Friends, will want to pursue that point.

The Bill introduces new court procedures, new social work tasks, and a requirement for new expertise in seeking care orders that deal with rights, responsibilities, access, where children may be placed, and who may look after them. That amounts to a major challenge in the training of social workers and the courts in those new duties. The new emergency protection order, for example, will last a maximum of eight days, and there is a right of parental challenge after 72 hours. A social worker will have to investigate and guide the court not only in respect of the grounds of the order but in contacts with parents and medical or psychiatric examinations. Most local authorities will be compelled to reallocate resources and find additional staff time for those new obligations.

Any reasonable assessment of those new tasks reveals that there remains an unreasonable expectation by the Government as to the ability of local authorities to finance staff training for those new demands. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House will re-examine that aspect. Good planning, good preparation and good training will always win the day. The Bill sets the seal on child care and child protection for generations to come. It must not be introduced only to founder because of underprepared or poorly instructed staff in local authorities and in the courts.

The Bill, elegant and straightforward in its aim, still leaves too much to fortune. It places an unhappy and worrying reliance on decisions still to be made by rules of court or by the Secretary of State. It appears that fundamental areas of regulation will be left to secondary legislation and will not benefit from parliamentary scrutiny. In those circumstances, rules of court will determine who will be party to care proceedings and when a child will have a right to party status in care proceedings. We believe that a child should automatically have a right to party status in care proceedings. Rules of court may also determine who will be notified of an emergency protection order. We think that that should be made clear in the Bill.

Likewise, regulations to be made by the Secretary of State at some future date may define the notification procedure for private fostering arrangements. What is worrying about that is that a similar regulation-making power in the Foster Children Act 1980 was inserted, and regulations were not made. We support the view of the Save the Children Fund, which argues convincingly that there is an absolute need for regulations on private fostering to be inserted into primary legislation and not left in limbo, perhaps never to be introduced.

Opposition Members believe that omissions from the body of the Bill, such as those that I have just mentioned, will introduce unnecessary uncertainty and variation throughout the care and court system. We shall press the Government strongly to encode those fundamental elements. In all, the Bill contains more than 20 regulation-making powers, which we believe must be re-examined with a view to the full incorporaton of such regulations in the Bill.

We remain impressed by the Lord Chancellor's confidence that care cases will now move freely within the court structure, and will swiftly find their appropriate level and resolution. The Bill, however, does not specify how decisions will be reached, and what appeals may operate should a party wish to challenge the choice of court. We urge the Government to review the matter, and to say how the procedures will operate and how cases will be managed without delay, if only because confusion looms in that part of the Bill.

We believe that the Bill must contain clear directives so that children and their families do not suffer unnecessary harm owing to a lack of resources and of firm regulation in court procedures. Their future should not hang in the

balance of a yet unspecified set of adjustments and mere tinkerings with our over-burdened court system. Our children—our people—deserve better.

The current set of changes will not resolve the present uneven service that operates in England and Wales. The present guardian ad litem service, for example, is patchy and variable, and requires urgent reform. Proper training and funding is needed, and the service should be independent and available at the same standard throughout the court system. That is clearly not the case at present, and we shall urge the Government to accept their obligation to improve this vital ingredient of current child care practice.

In the absence of a family court, we must at the very least have access to the expert advice of guardians in every case that affects a child's future, and not just in the cases that any particular court considers relevant. If the Government acted with a will, they could start to build part of the court welfare services that would be needed to supply a future family court, and we hope that they will not waste that opportunity.

Mr. Cryer: Representations have been made to me by a body that includes guardians ad litem. According to that body, the obligations in the Bill will increase expenditure to provide the service by two or three times. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that to provide the basis for the Bill's success such a resource must be provided by the Government.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but the Minister did not mention resources relating to such matters as guardians ad litem. I hope that that omission will be rectified before the end of the debate.

Schedule 2 requires local authorities to seek payment from parents for the cost of keeping children in care, and that gives us real cause for concern. All the expert advice suggests that the exercise will often be more costly than is intended, owing to the administrative cost of chasing small amounts of money.

Often children and young people go into care briefly to give their parents a much-needed break, especially children with severe handicaps. Such admissions to care are not frivolous but are part of a planned treatment programme, and should not normally incur a charge. Of course, parents need to know where they stand in relation to the service that they receive: in that context we welcome the Lord Chancellor's acknowledgement that written agreements are an integral part of a child's voluntary reception into care. Agreements should spell out clearly the responsibility of all parties. Nothing in the Bill, however, defines the nature of those agreed conditions. It should state that when a child is voluntarily received into care there should be a binding agreement about the procedures to be adopted for the child's discharge from care.

As the Bill stands, a child could be inappropriately withdrawn from care by a parent without warning, which could be upsetting and dangerous for the child. We need to specify the conditions of a voluntary reception, and we hope that the Government will recognise, as we do, that coming into care voluntarily should be a planned and positive event.

Although the Bill is generally considered well conceived in respect of its overall balance between children and their parents, some child care professionals believe that there is a serious gap that can be filled only by a new clause. That applies most notably to child protection.

Let me briefly outline the problem as I see it. Quite often circumstances suggest grounds for suspecting that a child is in some kind of danger, but there might well be insufficient evidence to seek an emergency protection order. I think that the Minister would agree with that. The problem was recognised by Louis Blom-Cooper and his colleagues in their report on the tragic death in June 1986 of Kimberley Carlile. They recommended a child assessment order. The idea has been supported by some child care organisations, which argue for an order that would allow for the medical examination of a child without its removal from the family. That would certainly be less invasive of family life, and might help to prevent tragedies that have been all too familiar in recent years.

We recognise—and the Minister touched on the issue this afternoon—that there is no overall agreement among child care professionals in this regard, but we very much hope that the Government will agree to explore the matter with us. We are deeply worried about the possibility that the frequent uncertainties and suspicions that surround potential child abuse may not be swiftly resolved through the proposed range of care procedures. What the Minister has said this afternoon confirms our belief that he shares our interest in the matter, and we look forward to hearing his comments at a later stage.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Does my hon. Friend agree that the need for protection might arise in many circumstances and among many people in a way that we do not normally expect? I wonder whether his attention has been drawn to a report in *The Independent* on Tuesday this week. It concerns a visitor to this country who is travelling around the country subjecting some children —with the approval of their parents—to pain and trouble, with the intention of improving their physical and mental development by taking them to the limits of pain and endurance.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it ought to be possible to stop the activities of people like Igor Charkovsky instantly, and that parents who are quite well off and well educated should be able to receive counselling in the same way as those living on council estates in my constituency?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has made a useful point, and I hope that, given the wide support that the House has demonstrated, it will be pursued effectively in Committee.

The nation's most precious resource is our children—that is, all children. Many people believe that the Bill will set the future of child care legislation and practice for generations to come. It is not too much to say that we shall not be forgiven if we get it wrong: we shall not be forgiven if we leave children without the protection, support and warmth of a loving home, which every child needs.

We all believe that children's welfare must not become the football of politicians, or of anyone else. We believe, too, that the Bill must not become distorted by sectional interests. When the spoken word has been forgotten and the headlines discarded, people will have to live with and make sense of the legislation. The Bill must therefore receive the constructive yet critical scrutiny of all who believe, as we do, that urgent and effective reforms are needed.

[Mr. Clarke]

We must look closely at what the family means today and at whether the Bill really meets the challenge of what parents and adults need in order to help them through the stresses, the breakdowns and the tragedies that can overtake the closest of homes. We need to think about how we can provide every child who needs it with the physical, emotional and social support to set them on the road to responsible adulthood. The Children Bill provides a rare opportunity for all of us to demonstrate our own responsibility for the future—a future that must provide new generations with the essential building blocks for a safe, caring upbringing that is the right of each and every child.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman referred to hon. Members on both sides of the House wanting to help to secure responsible parenthood. Will he comment on children in the care of local authorities who prove to be persistent offenders and the view of the courts that they need greater powers to deal with such cases? Does he agree that the courts should have more powers when local authorities appear to fail to control unruly children?

Mr. Clarke: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's scathing comments about local authorities. If he serves on the Standing Committee, it may be possible for him to ensure that we make progress towards the establishment of family courts. Family courts in Scotland deal adequately with precisely the cases to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Whether we like it or not, society changes and, with it, family life. Statistics suggest that there is more divorce now than in the past. If the present trend continues, it is likely that one in five children will have divorced parents. One in seven families is a single-parent family, and 1·5 million children are living in a family that is headed by one parent. Nine out of 10 single parents are women. Over half of them are dependent on social security. Many of the remainder are trapped in low-paid jobs.

I am not making a judgment on divorce or single-parent families. My point is that many families need more material help today—and immediately. For many, there has been an unimagined increase in material wealth in the past era, but the plain fact is that that wealth has not been distributed equally. During the last decade, many families have suffered a slow decline into poverty. As the rich have got richer, literally millions of families are living on the margins of life—on low incomes or social security benefits. The Child Poverty Action Group estimates that 6·5 million people in families with children live in or near poverty. Furthermore, it was reported to the Select Committee on Social Services in July 1988 that Government figures underestimate the number of households with below average incomes.

What does that mean for children? One fifth of our population is under 16 years of age. A staggering 30 per cent. of children are living on the margins of poverty. We are talking about 3·5 million children. One in 10 children are estimated to be living in families where the head of the family is unemployed. While there has been more prosperity for some in this decade, for over 750,000 children there has been the experience of an unemployed parent, or parents, for over a year. Since 1979, according to the Child Poverty Action Group, there has been a 91 per cent. increase in children living on or below basic social security incomes. During the last decade there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the number of children living on family incomes that are below the average wage.

Contrary to popular opinion, this is no nanny state. Nanny in the last 10 years may have increased the overall level of social security payments but, had the system remained unchanged by the Government, nanny would not have taken over £11 billion from the global social security budget since 1979.

We debate the Children Bill knowing that nanny has been giving many of our families some nasty medicine in the last decade. Today families need more help than ever before. However, the Government refuse to provide clear instructions to local authorities on how to assess family need and what to do about it. There are no mandatory instructions to act. Certainly there is no mention of where resources will come from should a local authority wish to take up the Government's suggestion that they ought to identify need and do something about it.

It is not possible to look at the family in isolation. Family life is never simply the private world of parents and children. The family is shaped and influenced by a wider society. Few, surely, will share the Prime Minister's view that there is no such thing as society. One of the most significant changes in society in recent decades is the number of women in paid work. More and more families rely on the woman's wage. New labour markets often seek women in preference to men. Over half of married women now work. Rosy notions of every family with a male breadwinner, a housewife, two children, a hatchback and a labrador are very much the ad-men's invention. Families come in different shapes and sizes, with different ethnic origins, with different expectations and with very different incomes and attitudes towards such notions as marriage and the family.

We need a new system of co-ordinated welfare and legal provision to deal with the needs of today's families. The Bill makes a start in the right direction but it does not go far enough. For our part, we are stating clearly that the future of our most precious resource, our children, can be fully protected only by the development of a number of inter-related strategies—in health, education, housing and welfare. Although the Bill does not countenance the inclusion of wider policy changes, we hope to convince the Government that that is essential if we are to provide an effective and comprehensive service for our nation's children.

We recognise the need for an effective and co-ordinated set of family policies. The need for such a policy was made clear by the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, a decade ago in his comments to the Royal Commission on the distribution of income and wealth. Similarly, we believe that the Government have not acknowledged that the success of the Bill will ultimately depend upon changes in other Government policies. Families cannot cope without the support of good schools, good health services and decent housing and, for those without a wage, a sufficient level of income to enable them to enjoy basic standards of living that the rest of us all too easily take for granted.

The Bill is the beginning of a new era in child care services and is a welcome start to the creation of a proper family policy for England and Wales. We do not expect to get at this juncture and with this Government a fully

fledged set of family policies, but we state clearly for all to hear that that is our aim for the future. For the present, we shall bring a constructive and positive view to the Bill.

We urge the Government to join us in a spirit of co-operation when the Bill is considered in Committee. Improvements can be made to the new procedures. There are resource implications, from which we hope the Government will not shrink. In that context, the Bill is nevertheless a good Bill. The balance, in our view, is about right between parental responsibilities and children's rights.

We hope to convince the Government that this major landmark in child care legislation should not be seen in years to come as a collection of good intentions that lay barren through meanness in funding and a lack of clear thinking on some of the clauses. We ask the Government to join us in a spirit of shared optimism that here in this House we can lay the cornerstone of a better future for so many of our children and their parents or carers. I hope that we shall all be able to say that considerations of funding and political advantage came second and children first.

5.29 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The position of Conservative Members resembles that of an army under attack from every side. Not just one missile but a multitude is aimed in our direction. Shot, shell and cannonballs whistle over our battlements and past our ears. The river is rising, the siege is biting and violent thunderstorms rage upon us. If it is not the doctors, it is the lawyers, the football supporters, the brewers or the anti-privatisation lobby. While that barrage will never deter us from doing what we believe is right, it is nice, just for once, to discuss a Bill where surely sweetness, calm and light can obtain. Surely we must be at one in our desire to improve the lot of unfortunate children.

I dare say, having listened to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), that there will be some disagreement. But even when the hon. Gentleman says nasty things he sounds so nice because he is such a delightful man and uses that charming Scottish accent. None the less, his speech presages a few disagreements in Committee. Some will arise about matters that are not in the Bill and others will occur when its aims are thought better achieved in a different way. But in general I am hopeful about the passage of the Bill.

I warmly welcome the central theme that the best interests of the child should govern court decisions. That is to be welcomed all the more because it is not a general rule. In abortion, experimentation on unborn children, IVF or other fertilisation techniques, the child is secondary. Tonight, for once thank God, the Bill states that the best interests of the child should govern court decisions.

I also welcome the simplification of the law enshrined in the Bill. As was said in another place, the measure will repeal no fewer than seven post-war Acts, and several other Acts relating to children will be limited by the new provisions in the Bill.

I welcome the emphasis on keeping families together. Local authorities are to be given powers to provide a service which might prevent the breakdown of families. I await with great interest more details of that service. At last we are getting away from the harm caused to society in the 1960s by Lord Jenkins' pressure for permissiveness in Britain. We are recognising the crucial importance to society of stable family life. When the Law Commission's report is acted on, I hope that there will be some changes to divorce rules, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Monklands, West, because divorce and the breakdown of families is the major cause of misery inflicted on children today. Of necessity, the Bill deals with the results and not the causes of that misery, but I welcome the fact that two important Departments of State are together on the Bill. I hope that the Solicitor-General's Department will be able to help the Department of Health in deciding what should be done to save a great many children from the misery that they presently have to bear when families break up.

It is a comfort that the lessons of Cleveland have been learnt. We await with great interest the comments of hon. Members who have particular knowledge of that ghastly case. No longer will it be possible for children to be torn from the family home and kept away for weeks as happened under the truly disgraceful regime of Dr. Marietta Higgs. Care proceedings are to be made fairer for parents and children. The Bill is built around those five major points and hon. Members on both sides of the House must support its aims, at any rate.

Of course there are a few criticisms. I share the view that it would have been much better to introduce family courts. I agree with the views expressed in another place that guardians ad litem must be independent of local authorities and be seen as such by parents. I read with great interest the debate in another place. The Lord Chancellor was clearly sympathetic to that view when he dealt with an amendment on the subject in another place on March 16 at column 398. Although the Lord Chancellor clearly agreed with the independence of the guardian ad litem, the amendment was not accepted because discussion on the consultation paper had not been completed. I do not know whether the discussion has now been completed, but I hope that the Lord Chancellor's Department eventually will administer a guardian ad litem scheme. If that happens—and there may be further amendments in Committee—it will be a useful step towards family courts.

I should like to ask my hon. and learned Friend a direct question about clause 16. The guidance on clause 16 states that the clause

> "requires local authorities to provide day care for children in need who are aged five or under and not attending school and enables them to provide such care or supervised activities as they consider appropriate for children who are attending a school."

I entirely agree with that, but the next sentence is most enigmatic:

> "It also empowers local authorities to make such provision for children who are not in need."

I do not understand that. If we are to make provision for children who are not in need, we will not have the money and resources for provisions which children need. The Bill will require much more money to be spent, so why on earth are we frittering it away on provisions which children do not need? I should like some enlightenment on that point because I must warn my hon. and learned Friend that universal pre-school education from the age of two will become very expensive. I am in favour of such help being available to one-parent families in which the mother has to go out to work to keep her family and the child needs the

[Dame Jill Knight]

service, for one reason or another, but it does not make sense to provide that service to children who do not need it.

I do not always trust local authorities. There have been recent cases of children becoming prostitutes while in local authority care and other recent cases of children being sexually abused by local authority staff while in care. I believe that now persons who have a police record for child molestation can no longer take posts under local authorities in child care without their records being known. We need to know whether that is now the case. Is my hon. and learned Friend confident that every possible safeguard has been built in to ensure that local authorities never abuse the role that society has given them as stand-ins for parents?

It is only fair to say a word or two about the fact that the overwhelming number of local authority officers do a wonderful job. They must sometimes feel that they can never get anything right. In the baby Beckford case, they did not take enough action and in the Cleveland case they took far too much. Balance in this matter is very important. That is why I am worried about young and inexperienced social workers being called upon to perform balancing acts of judgment which would be difficult for older people. In addition, many social workers have big case loads and that has meant problems for children in care.

Lines have to be drawn between stopping child sexual abuse and what happened at Cleveland, and between cruelty and discipline. To counter a point made earlier, I must say that I should certainly oppose any amendment that sought to prohibit spanking by parents. It would be absurd to try to pass a law that said that parents were not allowed in any circumstances to give a brisk tap from time to time on that part of the anatomy that the good Lord provided for the purpose. There is a great deal of difference between that and child abuse.

I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will take on board the great concern of some of us about the Church of England "Children's Plea" because there is another side to the question. Many children run away from good homes and not all children tell the truth. If we are proposing to set up an arrangement whereby such children can be kept away from their parents willy-nilly and whereby their parents will not even be informed, we shall be in serious trouble.

In a Bill of such complexity and importance, there are bound to be many questions, but my hon. and learned Friend can be absolutely assured of warm support for what he intends to do to help our children.

5.42 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I have read the *Official Report* of the proceedings in the other place. With all due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), with whom I rarely disagree, I must say without reservation that I gladly and warmly congratulate the Lords on the many hours of deliberation and concern devoted to the Bill. I must admit that I expressed concern when it was announced that the Bill was to start its passage in the other place, but one saw the House of Lords at its best in those discussions. No doubt my hon. Friend will make his points when the Bill goes into Committee and the Committee will perhaps rectify any points not rectified in the other place. Nevertheless, I regret that the Bill will not be debated in a Committee of the whole House because many hon. Members in the House today who are interested in the Bill and others who are otherwise engaged will not have the opportunity to serve on the Committee. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that we shall follow the Committee's deliberations closely and I wish its members God speed in bringing the Bill back adequately and suitably amended.

There has never been a more important Bill before Parliament. It is an opportunity to lay the foundations for stable families, to minimise the disadvantages, emotional stress and trauma suffered by innocent children and to end for ever the despair, grief, frustration, torment, mental torture, and humiliation which follow the award of custody to the other parent by the judiciary. A rational, fair and compassionate approach to the rules for family disputes could change the public's attitude to families and parenting for the better. Many children will benefit by improvements in their behaviour, standards, judgment, relationships, loyalties, mental strength, creative talents, personalities, compassion for others and attitudes to crime and violence. All those factors mould the character of our country. They are a sound investment for the future and influence our potential to survive and progress in today's and tomorrow's world. By abolishing the uncivilised battle for possession of a child by two people who once loved each other, the Children Bill, which emphasises the importance of both mothers and fathers in child-rearing, will end the inhuman, callous and cruel practice of divorcing a child from one of his or her loyal and devoted parents.

How many times have we interviewed constituents in our surgeries who are preparing for divorce? How many times have we witnessed the arguments between mother and father and looked across at the children involved in the dispute in despair, knowing that unless the couple make arrangements those children will be taken away from the love of one or the other parent? I have often witnessed that and I find it heart-breaking. I am fortunate to have been well and truly honoured with a faithful and kind wife and children, as well as grandchildren.

How many of us, having secured a majority of votes from 60,000 to 70,000 constituents, become disillusioned when crucial issues which above all involve the children of today, the mothers and fathers of tomorrow and the grandparents of the future are left to be dealt with through ten-minute Bills or Adjournment debates, when representatives of the Press Gallery and the media are tucked up in their beds? Children, parents and grandparents who are seeking help, guidance and support are rarely aware that some hon. Members are interested in the issue and are constantly seeking ways to help them in trying to solve their problems and, whenever possible, trying to introduce measures to alter the law. I hope that our debate today will have the media coverage that it deserves and that it will inform all involved that Parliament—not the politics of it, but all caring and compassionate hon. Members—is here to make every possible attempt to express the cries for help, to respond to the pleas for carefully-drafted laws to help people and to assist in introducing measures to solve most of the problems that the present legislation has failed to solve.

As has already been said, the Children Bill is a formidable piece of legislation to reform the law referring

to children. It will help significantly in providing local authority services for children in need and for others requiring help. It will amend the present laws in respect of children's homes, community homes, voluntary homes and voluntary organisations and it will make provisions on fostering and adoption.

It is not possible in the short time available to me to cover even briefly the Bill's numerous clauses and I am sure that hon. Members will understand if I concentrate on asking all concerned to look again at extending further rights to grandparents. On Wednesday 17 February 1988 I presented a ten-minute Bill—the Grandparents (Adoption of Children) Bill. The House agreed to its First Reading, but the Bill failed to achieve a Second Reading on 22 April and therefore made no further progress. Nevertheless, I secured an Adjournment debate on 27 May on children in care and placed on the record the need for further consideration of grandparents' rights. I also submitted early-day motion 792 in the last Session of Parliament, headed "Grandparents' Rights and Grandchildren", which stated:

"That this House deplores the increasing frequency of grandparents being deprived of the right of access to, care, fostering or adoption of their grandchildren; notes with alarm the attitude of some social services employees; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to introduce early legislation to give legal rights to grandparents providing immediate right of access before children are taken into care and the right to be present or legally represented at any official hearing or inquiry regarding future access to, care, fostering and adoption of their grandchild or grandchildren."

That early-day motion was supported by 331 right hon. and hon. Members of all parties. I draw it specifically to the attention of the House because with 650 hon. Members elected to serve in the House and entitled to take their seats, if 331 signed my early-day motion—a figure which could not include Mr. Speaker or yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and your colleagues as Deputy Speakers, and which could not include Ministers, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, senior Whips of either party and many others who could not sign an early-day motion—that means that an overwhelming majority of Members expressed the view that my early-day motion should be approved. If a majority of hon. Members declare their support—even for a early-day motion, of which many people take little notice—and their opinion that the Government should include such provisions in their legislation, the Government should, with the full support of the Opposition, ensure that such measures are introduced into law.

Therefore, I am disquieted, concerned and more than disappointed to find that, after all the pressure that has been brought to bear and all the questions that have been asked of the Leader of the House at Question Time about the progress of the Children Bill, and because of the promise that early legislation would be introduced to implement or to introduce measures to implement the provisions of the early-day motion, little if anything on that subject has been incorporated in the Bill. My research has not only left me bitterly disappointed—it has led me to realise that perhaps the only way to secure those provisions is to highlight for those who may serve on the Committee the clauses that I should like them to consider. I hope that you will bear with me in this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to take too much time because many other hon. Members wish to speak, but I want to draw this matter to the attention of those on my own Front Bench as I noticed that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West did not express much concern about grandparents when he might have spent a considerable time dealing with that issue.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I have enormous respect for my hon. Friend and I am grateful to him for giving way. One of my criticisms of the conclusions reached by the Lords, although it is not a criticism of the work that their Lordships and especially Labour colleagues carried out, was precisely the point that my hon. Friend has made—that that issue is not covered in the Bill. I happily give my hon. Friend the unqualified assurance that we shall fight in Committee and table amendments or new clauses to sustain the excellent point that he has made.

Mr. Powell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that I shall be more satisfied with that promise than with the promises that I have received from the Leader of the House and other quarters. I thank my hon. Friend very much.

Although I have read practically every word that was uttered in the other place, which is why I express my gratitude for the work that their Lordships have accomplished, the only mention that I found of grandparents was on 6 December 1988, when Lord Meston stated:

"I ask that Clause 70 will not diminish the hard-won status of grandparents in care proceedings. In practice grandparents who are willing and able to help are still too often overlooked in these cases. At first sight, one criticism of the Bill before us is that it may make matters too difficult for grandparents and for foster parents to contribute. Foster parents are special people entitled to special consideration."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 December 1988; Vol.502, c. 501.]

I have received thousands of letters from grandparents all over the country which I have read and re-read. It has been suggested that I am not especially sensitive, but as the pairing Whip I am certainly sensitive. I am also especially sensitive to letters from grandparents who find themselves deprived of the opportunity to be with and to love their grandchildren, or even to see them. Grandparents who have reared children from birth until the ages of 11, 12 or 14 may find that the children are then either fostered out or taken away and the grandparents deprived of access to see them. When grandparents have to hide behind church walls, bus shelters, school walls and school toilets just to get a glimpse of their grandchildren, there is something wrong with the law. There is something wrong with a society that can allow such things to happen to grandparents.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh) *rose*——

Mr. Powell: I should like to finish this point first because it is important.

That is why I am campaigning for grandparents and that is why I am concerned that grandparents should have rights. Grandparents want rights because in today's society, where everybody is on the grab for what they can get, grandparents are only offering their love to someone else. They do not want anything from their grandchildren—all that they want is to give something. It is a refreshing change in today's avaricious society to have people who want to give something instead of always wanting to take.

Mr. Holt: I, too, have cases concerning grandparents which I shall perhaps come to later. In Cleveland, however, not only were the grandparents refused access,

[Mr. Holt]

but the children were deliberately taken to places well away from Cleveland and no information was allowed to be passed to the grandparents, who were deliberately kept away from their grandchildren. Not only could those grandparents not sneak behind the school or anywhere else to see their grandchildren—they were not even allowed to know where the children were living.

Mr. Powell: Yes, I appreciate that point as I was fortunate to receive the Cleveland report from my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and I have read every word of it. I appreciate the problems that occurred there and the trauma for the parents and grandparents. The Cleveland issue will undoubtedly be a subject for debate in the Standing Committee.

I shall hurriedly run through the clauses that I should like the Committee to consider, but first I should emphasise that the word "grandparents" is mentioned only twice in the Bill, on both occasions in the same context. On page 66, line 24, as part of clause 75(1), the definition of "relative" is given as follows:

"'relative', in relation to a child, means a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by affinity) or step-parent".

The same definition is given in clause 55, which is somewhat negative in relation to grandparents in that in paragraph (1)(a)(iii) it prevents them from fostering their grandchildren. However, clause 56 (5)(a)(iii), on page 52, gives the local authority the right, if necessary, to put a child in the care of its grandparents or other relative. This seems to be only a backup if the welfare of the child is in danger without private fostering. I should have thought that the latter section would have come before the former in that it would be better to put a child in the care of a relative before considering private fostering arrangements. The same argument applies to clause 50, which relates to the welfare of children in the care of voluntary organisations. Apart from a mention in schedule 7, paragraph 2(1)(a), under "Privately fostered children", there appears to be no further mention of grandparents or relatives in the whole Bill.

After all the promises given from the Government Front Bench about all the points that I have made, I should have expected far more thought and consideration to be given to the subject of grandparents. For some reason, grandparents do not seem to be defined as members of the child's family unless the child has been living with them and they have parental responsibility for the child, or the grandparents are living with the children. On page 12, in clause 15(10) "family" in relation to such a child is defined as including any person who has parental responsibility for the child and any other person with whom he has been living. That definition would normally be taken to mean parents, step-parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, siblings and, of course, grandparents, and indeed uncles and aunts who happen to be living in the same house.

There is so much to be said that I will trust my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West to read what I have prepared. That will enable me to conclude my speech and give my colleagues and a number of Conservative Members the opportunity to be called. I do not believe in hogging the Floor when my hon. Friend on the Front Bench can take up these matters.

There are a number of other places in the Bill where it may be possible to include specific mention of grandparents. This must be given very careful consideration since it may be wrong to give grandparents certain rights while not giving them the responsibility that parents have to bear. I do not see many problems arising if we aim to give grandparents reasonable access to children who happen to be under or about to come under local authority care.

The other issue to which I wish to refer concerns the inadequacy of the funding provided by the Government for the whole of the Bill. I want to be assured that there will be plenty of funding for adequate training of people. I have a great regard and respect for the majority of social workers and I have come in contact with a number of them, in connection not only with grandparents' rights but with other matters, and I feel that perhaps more money should be spent on the training of social workers.

I share the view expressed by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame Jill Knight) about family courts. "Agenda", the local government booklet, states:

"NCH has joined forces with other agencies in the Family Courts Campaign. It is our belief, and that of other organisations, that the interests of children brought before Courts in whatever manner would be better served by the creation of a unified Family Court. The Lord Chancellor's views in debates suggests that he does not contemplate introducing legislation for the establishment of such a court at this time."

I believe that if such a court were established it could solve a lot of our problems, particularly the problems of grandparents in relation to adoption and access.

6.4 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I begin by promising the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) that if it is my good fortune to be on the Committee of the Bill, as I hope it will, I will support his campaign for grandparents, to get those clauses in place. I am not even sure that it will be necessary, because the Minister referred in his opening remarks to the fact that he was taking on board something to safeguard the rights of grandparents. So I believe that the hon. Gentleman's long campaign has not been in vain. It shows that when Back Benchers keep going they can get there in the end. So I say, "Well done".

Everybody will agree that the Children Bill is long overdue, yet, because of the time it has taken to produce it, I am sure that it is a better and stronger Bill. Over the past few years, we have all read of extremely sad and unnecessary cases resulting in harm to, and sometimes the death of, a baby or a child. The details of such cases have been so horrific that many people have been unable to read very far beyond the headlines. This would be a very poor nation if we failed to learn the lessons from each of the inquiries that followed such tragedies.

The Criminal Justice Act 1988 contained any amount of splendid provisions for the further protection of children and they were debated at length before being approved by Parliament. That Act, as it applied to children and court procedures, had a great measure of all-party support as well as great public support. I anticipate that the passage of the Children Bill will be marked by efforts to put children's needs first and political differences aside.

Of course, the Opposition will wish to make amendments, and rightly so; that is what an Opposition are for. But also the Government will want to put in other

measures to complete the work that has been done with great dedication in another place. The Government may want to address themselves to such things as the registration and regulation of standards of private nurseries and child minders and the exemption of children's organisations from liability for the offence of harbouring a minor. This applies to safe houses and places of refuge, and so on.

I hope that it will be possible for the Committee to make provision for the idea of a family court. There is a tremendous amount of support for the family court system in both Houses of Parliament. The Lord Chancellor was very encouraging about family courts on Second Reading of the Bill. I do not give in on this one. I think that, in the fullness of time, we shall get there, and perhaps within this Bill we can lay the foundations for family courts. I believe that the cornerstone of the Children Bill is the attempt to ensure that courts put the feelings and needs of the child first and foremost and provide a better balance between the rights of parents and those of children, and of course of grandparents.

Local authorities and child care agencies are in very stressful, high-risk professions. In child protection, many pressures are put on them. As in many professions, fatal mistakes have been made in the past. In the majority of cases, the system and procedures have failed and have produced indecision and confusion, resulting, perhaps, in tragedy.

The reform of child care law in respect of child care proceedings and the emergency protection of children will help field workers, and that is a big move forward. The courts' powers to protect children from abuse and neglect are strengthened in the Bill. The Children Bill, which is certain to be referred to a Committee tonight—I hope without the need for a vote—has been described by the Lord Chancellor as

"the most comprehensive and far reaching reform of child law which has come before Parliament in living memory."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 December 1988; Vol. 502, c. 488.]

There could not be a more meaningful statement.

We should remind ourselves that the Bill is the result of many excellent reports arising from tragic events, tremendous consultation with all organisations which take an interest in the welfare of children, an enormous amount of work within Government Departments and by the parliamentary draftsmen, and, not least, the parliamentary all-party children's group chaired by Baroness Faithfull, who is not too far away at this moment, and the many individuals who have campaigned for years for better child protection.

All hon. Members can take pride in the fact that, at last, the legislation has arrived. We must make it work and improve it so that it will be the good piece of legislation that the Lord Chancellor says it will be. It will certainly be long and jolly hard work for hon. Members on the Committee. Let us pay tribute to the marvellous work that was undertaken in another place. Let parents and grandparents everywhere be aware that, at last, Parliament is listening to the children's cries of misery. At last we will have on the statute book legislation that will bring greater child protection.

6.11 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I welcome this clarification and simplification of the current legislation dealing with children. However, I and other hon. Members are disappointed that the Government have not taken this opportunity to introduce family courts into our legal system. On Second Reading in the other place, the Lord Chancellor implied that the proposals in the Bill were the first stage in the process of introducing family courts. He implied also that it would be inappropriate to attempt major reforms in one go, and that a gradual approach would be more beneficial. I must admit that other Government proposals for reform, including those for the legal profession, have not led me to believe that the words "caution" and "prudence" are part of the Government's vocabulary. Perhaps I will be proved wrong.

In 1974, the Finer committee produced its proposals for a unified family court system. Since then, there has been a steady growth of support. Today, it would be difficult to find many voices in disagreement. Our legal system is complex and far from accessible. Even if the Government's proposed changes to the legal system and the legal profession are accepted, the experience of having to go to law to resolve a family problem will not be less frightening and awesome to people who are often under emotional stress. Decisions to take a child into custody or to award custody and other similar moves are not reached lightly or easily. Such decisions have serious consequences, not only for the child but for other members of the family. Whatever system or methods we employ, we cannot always guarantee that the right decision will be made.

Evidence from countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which have had family court systems for over 10 years, shows that such a system can work successfully and improve standards in child care and the prevention of abuse. A family court would provide an informal and sensitive setting in which family problems and solutions could be aired freely. Consultation, discussion and decisions would be undertaken by staff who are specifically trained in child care and are aware of the needs of a child in a family.

Often, under the present system, children regard themselves as the cause of the problems. They suffer guilt when none should apply. In other cases, they are treated merely as the chattels of one or other of the partners. Family courts could do a great deal to relieve that burden. Parents, children and, if advantageous, members of the extended family would all be involved in reaching the decision that will affect the children's lives and future. I urge the Government to reconsider their position and use this opportunity—it may be the last—to introduce family courts into our legal system.

In the absence of family courts, the proposals to extend jurisdiction to county courts and the High Court will help to simplify and rationalise the present law and procedures. However, they also raise concern about possible delays in the hearing of cases, despite the provisions in clause 10 which create an assumption that delay is detrimental to a child's welfare. Long waits and serious delays are more likely to occur when courts are already far overstretched. There is also some worry that the expertise that has been built up by juvenile court magistrates, as is the case in London, will be lost. It is important to ensure that there

[Mr. Ronnie Fearn]

are adequate resources and provisions for the training of magistrates and circuit judges before they hear cases brought under the Act.

Another matter of concern is the amount of secondary legislation which is allowed by the Bill. As we know, such legislation tends to get a perfunctory glance from Parliament, which has little or no opportunity to scrutinise it before it is implemented. In some cases, regulations which may have major implications are not introduced. Some matters in the Children Bill which are left to the regulating powers of the Secretary of State or to the rules of court raise too many important issues to be allowed to slip by.

For instance, should not children have an automatic right to party status in care proceedings? After all, their welfare and future lives are under consideration. Surely it should be the case that a child is not a party to proceedings only because of very exceptional circumstances. Such an event could be accommodated by some form of exemption subsection in the main clause conferring on the child automatic party status in care proceedings. That is a matter for further discussion in Committee.

Is this not an opportune time for the Government to consider a children's charter incorporating certain rights and entitlements, which could be attached to the Bill? The general thrust of the Bill—that is, that a child's welfare should be the court's paramount concern—is welcome, but a charter outlining children's rights in relation to that welfare would help to clarify matters and act as a backdrop against which all decisions are made.

Several groups and individuals have expressed fears about the structure of the Bill and difficulties of interpretation. The Bill needs more guidance on interpretation, particularly specific phrases as they relate to each clause. Some of the phrases I have in mind are "in need" and "standards of care". Perhaps they could be clarified. I know that the Lord Chancellor hopes that the Bill should be read as a whole, but he should be aware also that different interpretations are easily applied to a Bill of this nature. It is important that there should be uniformity among those who read and apply it.

I am a little concerned also at the lack of attention to the need for more staff and resources. Recent reports on child abuse have shown that it is necessary to do that if we are to get right the balance between overreacting and underreacting. More and better trained social workers, foster parents, police and other groups are the key to success——

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a violation of the tradition of the House that an hon. Member should read his speech? Members on the Front Benches read speeches, but am I not right in saying that a Back Bencher is not entitled to read a speech?

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the tradition is to refer to notes but not to read from them.

Mr. Fearn: The matter is of such concern that we should get everything right. So far, every hon. Member has read his speech and got it correct. We must be correct on the Bill. I hope the hon. Gentleman accepts that.

The Bill does not address important factors that contribute to the well-being of children, such as inadequate housing and income, general deprivation and others that are sometimes aggravated by the Government's lack of concern and their policy on local government, social security payments, child allowance and numerous other matters. The Government have the power and the opportunity to improve provisions. They should do so if they are serious about offering children protection and the good start in life that is so important. Some of the legislation, regulations and policy governing those aspects interlock with the provisions of the Bill. I should like to see more scrutiny of the effects of other legislation and local government duties and responsibilities on the provisions of the Bill, and vice versa.

The Bill has been the subject of much lobbying in the other place. The noble Lords tabled many amendments. Very few were accepted by the Lord Chancellor, although some views were taken into account. The lobbying has continued here. The majority of the amendments that will be tabled have been carefully thought through by people with wide experience of child care.

I said earlier that the Bill is most welcome. I believe that in general it will have all-party support and will not prove contentious. The matters it raises are serious and need careful deliberation. Time will be required to ensure that no ground is left unploughed. As other hon. Members have said, we must get the legislation right this time. Will the Government assure hon. Members that the House will be given whatever time is necessary to get it right? I hope that proceedings on the Bill in this House will show that there are times when all sides can negotiate, co-operate and reach the agreement which in this case will prove to be in the best interests of the children and of their families.

6.22 pm

Sir Dennis Walters (Westbury): As my hon. and learned Friend the Minister explained in his clear and convincing speech, there is a great deal in the Bill which should help to improve and protect the arrangements for the welfare of children and it is much to be welcomed, as was recognised by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) in his thoughtful speech on behalf of the Opposition. I should have welcomed the Bill even more if it had contained a specific provision about family courts, and I agree with several hon. Members who thought that this might have been an opportunity to take that step which has been debated and written about for such a long time.

It was my privilege to introduce the Children and Young Persons (Amendment) Act 1986, which received Royal Assent in July that year. Inevitably, to win the support of the Government, without which no private Member's Bill has much chance of reaching the statute book, I had to jettison a number of proposals which were in the original Bill. Nevertheless, a good many others were still in the measure when it received its Third Reading. One change that I sought to achieve was the introduction of the necessary powers to ensure that in appropriate cases children could be compulsorily examined medically from time to time as a safeguard against neglect or abuse. I am pleased that provisions for medical examination of children are included in the Bill, in relation both to emergency protection orders under clause 36(4) and supervision orders under the provisions of part 1 of schedule 3.

The legislation that I introduced will be repealed when this far more important, comprehensive and significant

Bill comes into force, and I make no complaint about that. It is right that the law in relation to children should be gathered together in one place as far as possible. When my small measure was passed, one was looking forward to comprehensive legislation to follow it and that is now taking place. I am concerned, however, that some of the positive things achieved by my Act are being left rather vague or at the mercy of subordinate powers. The appeal provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 in care cases will be repealed by the Bill. One reform that was made by my Act was an amendment to the 1969 Act to give to all parents a right of appeal in care cases. The new measure is silent about the right of appeal in care cases or in relation to any of the types of family proceedings under the Bill.

Clause 67 gives the Lord Chancellor very wide powers and discretion as to the types of proceedings that take place in different courts and the transfer of proceedings from one court to another. There is some unease, which I share, that once the Bill is enacted those powers may be used to confine some family proceedings to magistrates courts in the interests of economy. Most people who know about the subject would much prefer that this specalist and delicate work was dealt with by professional judges and, in particular, that the very special expertise of the High Court judges in the Family Division should not be lost to this important part of our law. I hope that that will be clarified in Committee. Perhaps my hon. and learned Friend the Minister will refer to it in his reply to the debate. If we are not to lose the expertise of High Court judges, it is important that there should be a full and general right of appeal to the High Court and from there to the Court of Appeal. I hope, again, that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister can assure us that that will be forthcoming, if not through an amendment to the Bill, by the rules to be made under it.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) spoke eloquently about grandparents. I, too, am concerned about the position of grandparents. The Act that I introduced gave grandparents a specific right to apply to become parties in care proceedings, and for them to become parties with the leave of the court within certain parameters prescribed by the rules of court. That is being repealed and the provisions of the Bill make no express reference to grandparents. I appreciate that under clause 9 there is the general possibility for any person who can show a sufficient connection with a child to apply for leave to make an application for a section 7 order. I appreciate, too, that under clause 9 (6) rules of court may at a later date enlarge the categories of persons who have an automatic right to apply for a section 7 order, and that under clause 68 rules of court may make provision as to the persons entitled to be parties to proceedings or to participate by making representations to the court. I strongly believe, however, that after the parents there is a particular and special relationship between a child and his grandparents, both emotionally and in terms of responsibility. Grandparents have a particular right to be consulted and, if they wish, to be involved in court proceedings concerning their grandchildren's future. I hope that will be incorporated in the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will note that considerable feeling has been expressed by Members on both sides of the House about that issue.

Like other hon. Members, I was enormously impressed by the number of letters that I received from grandparents all over the country expressing the depth of their feelings and experiences, to which the hon. Member for Ogmore referred so eloquently.

I believe that what I have asked for could easily be incorporated in the Bill, and would make it a better Bill. I hope that the Minister and the Government will take a sympathetic attitude to the points that have been raised.

6.31 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westbury (Sir D. Walters) and his remarks about grandparents. The hon. Member for Langaurgh (Mr. Holt) intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) concerning grandparents, and expressed the deep disquiet and distress of grandparents in Cleveland, who, when their grandchildren were taken from them, found to their chagrin that they had no recourse. The Minister said that he would listen carefully to any changes for grandparents that we might suggest in Committee. We look forward to that opportunity.

It is proper that you, Mr. Speaker, are in the Chair dealing with the Second Reading, because it was your granting of a private notice question fewer than two years ago that obliged the Minister to explain to the House what was happening in Cleveland and what he proposed to do about it. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) mentioned all those who have been involved over the years with child care. Many of us know how difficult it is to involve oneself in child care, because it is an emotive subject and whoever raises it finds his head squarely above the parapet and likely to be shot off. You, Mr. Speaker, heard the Minister announce a judicial inquiry. The recommendations of Lord Justice Butler-Sloss in that inquiry, the work of Members of Parliament, both in and outside the House, on child care, and the steady drift of recommendations in committees, have resulted in this Bill. It is a Bill that will probably lay down the child care laws of our country for many years to come. Parliament has come together, through you, Mr. Speaker, the Minister, and other Front Bench spokesmen and hon. Members, to change the law of the land. That is the way in which we should be doing things in the House. In one sense, I am grateful to be part of that procedure and to see how it has worked positively in the interests of our children.

I came to the House rather in the manner of Mark Antony, because I came to bury not Caesar but Cleveland as an issue of child abuse. In the past two years the county has suffered enormously due to a great deal of irresponsible comment. A great stigma lay across the county. That stigma has now been erased. All the major participants in the Cleveland child abuse crisis are no longer in their jobs. It is not for me to dwell on that, but there are new faces, a new broom is sweeping clean and there is a new co-operation between the police and social services in Cleveland. There is a genuine attempt to regain in the county confidence, not only in our Health Service, but in social services. Social services took a great deal of criticism for their actions—so, too, did the health authority—and, now the tide is turning, we see a genuine effort to resolve the difficulties. Multi-disciplinary proceedings are now being established between the police and social services. Those will be in the interests of the people of Cleveland. They may, in a sad but necessary

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

way, lead the way for other multi-disciplinary proceedings up and down the country, which would be of great assistance to other children.

We have seen throughout the ages that children do not get other than a raw deal. I recently reviewed a book about how children have been abandoned throughout the ages. In our own generation, we have seen Parliaments letting power slip away from them and an imbalance created between family life and the proper role of the social services.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) stated sincerely that family life remains the basis of our society. That family life has come under a fundamental and serious attack over the years. For a variety of sociological reasons, as well as others, we have seen a steady erosion of the family base. The Bill should seek to restore the balance in the family and should also clearly state the role of the local authority. We need training for social workers. They find themselves in sensitive and difficult situations. We need to share the burden among those who are involved in child care work. It should not be right for one individual to take full responsibility for a particular incident.

In Cleveland we saw the dreadful effect of the place of safety order, which could be misused in the hands of an over-zealous authority. The place of safety order is being replaced by an emergency protection order. The House should discuss what will happen in a real emergency where a child has not been revealed to the social worker or to whoever else visits the house. With the spirit that we have in the House and the unanimity among us—not perhaps on the detail, but certainly on the structure of the Bill and its importance—we can consider all those matters in Committee and devise something special, interesting and important for those children.

I have dwelt upon the effects of the crisis in Cleveland and the child care law in relation to Cleveland. I must do that in the interests of my constituents and all those who were involved. It has been a long haul for me, for the hon. Member for Langbaurgh who shares with me the constituency of Middlesbrough, and for the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who is not in the Chamber at present. I am reminded of the words of Winston Churchill in the 1930s, who said that the only shield of a Member of Parliament is his conscience. I refer, too, to the words of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who said that a man must do what he must in spite of all opposition, and that was the basis of all human morality.

Members of Parliament throughout the Cleveland crisis, and who have discussed child care in the House over many years, should feel a sense of achievement. If I catch the eye of the Committee of Selection, I shall look forward to working on the Committee and modifying the law of the land for children. Children are the greatest thing that any of us have ever had and that any of us ever will have. If we can make the future better for them, we will make the world and our country better, and our democracy a stronger and safer place.

6.39 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I warmly welcome the Bill on behalf of my constituents. It represents a major reform of the law relating to children and the way in which they are brought up. It also affects the substance and incidence of parental status at law.

I declare an outside interest as I am parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales. I recently succeeded my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) to that post and I pay tribute to him for the long period of service that he gave to the federation and the considerable distinction with which he served it. I am glad to say that the federation welcomes the Bill and wishes to see it progress speedily to the statute book. A number of the aspects, however, concern the police and it would be helpful if my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General would comment on those when he replies.

As other Members have already pointed out, it is noteworthy that the Bill makes no provision for family courts. The federation believes that such courts will be essential in the future. I understand that my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has suggested that the Bill will enable the law affecting children to be applied uniformly, with a single system of courts, and that the new machinery, by which cases can be transferred to the county court and the High Court, and care applications to the domestic courts, has been introduced so as to decriminalise those cases. My hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State referred to that earlier. However, the police believe that the concept of a family court is important. They would like to be assured that that concept has not been abandoned, especially as the Select Committee on Social Services has also commented on this issue and believes that the Government should go further with their reforms.

At present the police and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children have the right to take care proceedings. Clause 26(1) provides for a child to be placed in care or under the supervision of an "authorised person". As I understand it, the "authorised person" means the local authority and the NSPCC. The powers hitherto operated by the police are to be removed. That is a major departure from long-standing practice and the House should consider it with great care. It is unique to authorise the NSPCC, but not the police, to initiate care proceedings because the police work closely with teams of social workers. The police are the first line of complaint and should therefore retain the right to initiate proceedings. I note that the police still have limited powers under clause 38, which reduces from 28 days to three days their right to remove a child to suitable accommodation.

It may help the House in its consideration of this matter if I quote from an excellent publication which is well known to social workers and to police officers. It is entitled "Working Together" and was published by the Department of Health and Social Security and the Welsh Office in 1988. Paragraph 4.5 says of the role of the police:

"The police are involved in cases of child abuse as a consequence of their general responsibility for the protection of life and limb, the prevention and investigation of crime and the submission of cases for criminal proceedings. In preparing cases for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service the police work to a standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt, which is not the same as the balance of probabilities on which a juvenile court must be satisfied in care proceedings. Even in cases where the police are not considering a submission in

respect of a prosecution they may be in possession of information that is highly relevant to any decision taken about a child who may need protection from abuse."

It would be sensible for the House to bear that advice in mind when considering the important change in the law in clause 26.

Clause 64 will mean that the making of a care order is decriminalised as it is thought that the police no longer need to initiate care proceedings. There are cases, however, where such action could be desirable. The court can still use care orders, but not for committing criminal offences. Is that why the right of police to initiate care proceedings has been replaced by the words "authorised person"? Is that a valid reason for taking away the specific power of the police to apply for a care order?

Clause 9 deals with the power of the court to make section 7 orders dealing with residence. It appears to exclude grandparents from having an automatic right of access to their grandchild. I accept, as has already been pointed out, that clause 29 says that parental contact may be made by

"any other person mentioned in subsection (1) . . . who has obtained the leave of the court",

but that clause does not specify grandparents as such. The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Sir D. Walters) have already raised this matter and their views have the full support of the Police Federation. I was pleased when the Minister of State said that he would consider the matter in Committee.

Clause 18 deals with the protection of members of the public from what is called "serious injury". The police are concerned to know what is meant by that phrase and how it will be precisely defined. Would a child who, in the opinion of a social worker or of the police, may be likely to set fire to premises be covered by that definition? Does the fact that a child may not have actually committed such an offence prevent action if the threat or risk of injury is perceived? That is an important matter which must be considered carefully.

Clause 21 deals with the use of accommodation restricting the liberty of a child. Clause 21(1)(b) refers to a child being likely to "injure himself". The question of definition is again important. What does that phrase mean? Does it mean to hurt or to damage, which is the definition given in my copy of the "Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English"? Does that definition include wounding? The police believe that the definition should be broad and clearly understood. I hope that the Committee will study that issue.

Clause 27 is also important. In a serious case, what happens when care and criminal proceedings are involved and where the criminal proceedings must be disposed of before the care order is made? Presumably this has in the past been covered, and will continue to be covered, by interim care orders. Is it the case, in every court where the care and criminal proceedings take place in tandem, that the care proceedings are not finalised while the criminal proceedings are pending? That is another point that needs to be clarified.

Clause 36 deals with the very important question of the emergency protection order. Once such an order has been made, it can direct production of the child for a medical or psychiatric examination. What will be the position of the local authority if it is unable to locate the child? What sanction is available against a parent who refuses to produce for this purpose a child in whose interests such a medical or psychiatric examination is considered to be desirable? It seems to me that no sanction is spelt out in the Bill, and I think that one is desirable.

In clause 39(5), a local authority that is refused access to a child is required to consider whether to apply for an emergency protection order, a care order or a supervision order. Again, I ask what sanction exists in the case of parents who refuse access.

Clause 40, dealing with sanctions, covers only the offence of perjury. But parents cannot commit perjury unless they go to court. Again, I ask what sanctions exist against parents if they refuse to hand over the child, and refuse to give information as to the child's whereabouts.

Another point that I wish to raise concerns the difficulty of a social worker in gaining emergency admission if he believes that a child—in the words of clause 39(1)(c)—

"has suffered significant harm or is likely to suffer such harm".

As I understand the position, the social worker has to apply to a magistrate for an emergency protection order. But that can take time. With the best will in the world, several hours could elapse before entry was gained, via the emergency protection order, with power of entry. The only alternative would be to take a police officer along, in which case power of entry could be used without a warrant only under section 17(1)(a) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. This could result in great difficulty for the social worker and for the police. Indeed, the police are reluctant to use their power under that Act to gain entry for that purpose and in those circumstances. I hope, therefore, that my right hon. Friend will look at that matter very carefully.

Clause 5 deals with persons disqualified from being private foster parents. One of the points that the police have raised with me is whether clause 57(2)(d) applies to spent convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. The police and hon. Members would find it helpful to know what procedures operate in respect of people who apply to become foster parents and who, say, have been private foster parents or have worked in a private children's home. Is there adequate protection to ensure that undesirable persons are not used as foster parents? What consideration is being given to the question of incorporating the recent guidance from the Home Office and the Department on checking the credentials of those who apply for various posts involving the care of children?

I mention these points because I think that it is important that they be clarified and spelt out clearly in the legislation. On behalf of my constituents and of the police, I warmly support the Bill and commend it to the House. I hope that it will speedily become the law of the land.

6.52 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Like other hon. Members on both sides of the House, I welcome the proposals in this Bill. It is a radical Bill from a radical Lord Chancellor. It will repeal seven post-war statutes and will amend many others, and it is appropriate that we should be considering these proposals at this time—100 years after the introduction of the first statute protecting children. Of course, the immediate background is Jasmine Beckford, Tyra Henry, Kimberley Carlile and the 100 or so children who die each year in those circumstances, as well as the 40,000 children on the at-risk register at various times of the year. But the reforms have much great implications.

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

I worked for almost three years as the senior child care solicitor for the London borough of Islington. I found the law complicated, confusing and inefficient, and at that stage I, like the council, regarded Islington's policy as the finest in the country. At the outset I should like to pay tribute to the social workers and the health visitors, and, indeed, even the lawyers, who work in child care. Social workers have had a very bad press recently, and the House should be aware of the great pressures that they are under in terms of the decisions they have to make and in terms of the lack of resources. It is right also that we should thank groups like the National Children's Bureau and the Family Rights Group which work voluntarily and unaided and do the kind of research that makes the task of both Government and Opposition so much easier.

I welcome the commitment in clause 1 to general welfare principles. It is very important that when the courts consider the circumstances of a child they be able to consider that child, and not any other child, in those circumstances. But I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman, when he replies to the debate, will tell us why, in clause 18, the local authority is placed under a duty different from that under which the court is placed in clause 1. That is a serious difference. It is extremely important that, if the courts are to consider the welfare of the child as being of paramount importance, that should be the duty of the local authority as well, because it would be seeking to obtain a care order for exactly the same purpose—to achieve what was in the best interests of the child.

I welcome the proposed change in the grounds for care proceedings. They are exactly the same as the current grounds for those who apply for wardship—though I am sure that the judges will not admit that those are the grounds. I welcome the introduction of the emergency protection orders, but I want to express two reservations. I agree that the place of safety orders lasted for too long a period—28 days is a very long time. At the end of that period the local authority would apply either for an extension or for an interim care order, and would then get another interim care order, perhaps for the same period. I believe that it is right that a limit should be placed on the emergency protection order period, subject to the limited circumstances of a renewal. But I do not think that parents should be expected to wait 72 hours before applying for a discharge. It would be fair and proper for a parent to be able to make application within 24 hours if he believed that he had the evidence to challenge the decision of the local authority. It is quite wrong that the Bill, in the clauses concerning the emergency protection order, does not spell out the various notices that have to be served on parents. It is wrong that we have to wait until rules are produced before these matters are clarified. It is reasonable to expect these matters to be provided for in the Bill because they affect deeply the intentions of parents.

Mr. Devlin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that point, but I do not agree with him at all about the 24 hours provision that he has suggested. Many parents, having had their children taken away, will not know immediately where to turn and will be extremely concerned. They will have to take legal advice, and if the circumstances arise, say, on Friday evening or Saturday morning, that legal advice will not be available until the following Monday. Those people will not want to go anywhere near a court or a judge or a social worker, or anyone else, until they have taken advice. The hon. Gentleman, like me, is a lawyer. He will therefore know that it sometimes takes time for people to think about the advice that they are given. Surely it is right that the period should be three days.

Mr. Vaz: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That is why notices should state precisely what has happened to the child. When I gave out notices as a child care solicitor, they included the names and addresses of child care solicitors, including emergency numbers for them. If those factors were in the Bill, parents would know exactly who to turn to. They would have a detailed account of solicitors who practise in that area.

I agree that proceedings in the courts take too long and I welcome the provision which allows the courts to draw up timetables. I have sat for many hours and days in the Highbury Corner magistrates and juvenile court after adjournment after adjournment. That was bad for parents and for children. If the court could specify a timetable, everyone would be clear about how long proceedings would last.

I hope that the Solicitor-General will confirm that the legal aid requirements on representation will be met in full. It is important that parents and children have ready access to solicitors and to legal aid. I hope that he will also confirm that the necessary means test requirements will be waived in emergencies.

Having welcomed some parts of the Bill, I want to draw attention to what is missing from it. I share the concern of many hon. Members about the Government's failure to honour their commitment to a family court. In July last year the Attorney-General made a pledge to come back to the House in the autumn and make a statement about family courts. On Second Reading on 6 December in another place, the Lord Chancellor said that the Bill was sufficient, but I disagree. This is an attempt to get a family court on the cheap. Clause 67 gives courts the power to transfer cases from different jurisdictions. Surely it is only a small step forward to allow a family court. The Bill creates a good legislative framework, but without the court structure to support it the Act will fail.

I fear that the Bill does not propose a family court for the same reason given by the Solicitor-General in Committee during consideration of the Legal Aid Bill. He told me then that justice should be cost-effective. The Government care about the cost rather than the principle. That is why the Biill contains no proposal for a family court.

I hope that we will be able to consider the placing and size of courts. Juvenile courts are not properly situated in our major cities. For example, the juvenile court in Leicester consists of one room with a waiting room twice the size of the court into which more than 100 people may be crowded. No refreshments or public telephones are available and people feel that justice is not supported.

There should have been more in the Bill about training and the provision of more resources for the training of judges, magistrates, social workers, health visitors and lawyers. All those people have a part to play in court proceedings. One organisation—I think the Association of Metropolitan Authorities—estimated that 24,000 people across London will need to be trained in one aspect of the law or another.

I deeply regret the decision effectively to end the wardship jurisdiction. Section 7 of the Family Law Reform Act 1969 gave local authorities and parents the ultimate right to go to the High Court. As a practitioner, I felt that the best form of justice available was not that of the juvenile court where magistrates were pressed for time, but the High Court. I remember warding many children because I felt that the tribunal of the High Court offered the best chance available to bring before the court some elements of evidence that may not be acceptable. Rules of evidence and procedure made it desirable to go to the High Court. The wardship jurisdiction must be kept as a safety net for local authorities, children and parents. In Committee, we shall press the Minister to reassert his commitment to wardship.

I am disappointed that the Bill contains no commitment to the statutory provision of education for the under-fives. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) will make that point when she sums up. It is important that local authorities should have a statutory duty to provide such education.

In conclusion, I draw attention to three matters. First, I want to commend Leicestershire county council. Last year, the council set up the first ever child rights officer. With the assistance of the National Association of Young People in Care, a report was produced which eventually led to the appointment of Dr. Michael Lindsay—the first ever child rights officer. His purpose is to advise children in care, to hear any complaints that they make and report them to the local authority. His post and his work have been an enormous success.

Secondly, I should have liked to have seen more in the Bill about the need to prevent children being taken into care. Figures from the Department of Social Security reveal that last year £9·1 million was spent on work to prevent the breakdown of families. Yet £434·1 million was spent on fostering and residential care. We should encourage local authorities to do preventive work. I am sad to see that section 1 of the Child Care Act 1980, which enshrines the principle of spending money in order to diminish the need to take children into care, has been tucked away in the schedules.

The Bill will run out of money. The resources that have been allocated for it, as stated in the financial memorandum, are far too low. According to various organisations, the Bill will cost £12 million to implement.

Finally, I favour the use of the words "parental responsibility", but I would have liked to have seen something in the Bill about state responsibility. I would have liked to have seen something in the Bill which reflects the past 10 years. It is all very well having fine words and fine sentiments about protecting children, but look at the policies of the past 10 years. During that time there has been an increase in crime, homelessness, unemployment and poverty. There has been the termination of certain benefits and the freezing of child benefit. All that has led to deprivation, with 2·2 million children living at or near the margins of poverty. That in turn has led to omission, neglect and abuse.

Dickens said:

"In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived or so finely felt as injustice."

If the Government want to do justice to children, they should use the Bill as a fresh start. They should arrest some of the appalling policies which have brought poverty to the nation's children. If they do that, they will have absolute and solid support from Opposition Members.

7.8 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Several hon. Members have already referred to this Bill as a children's charter. It is interesting to recall that exactly that label was applied to the first legislation which went through Parliament that recognised the child's need for protection in the home; that was in 1889, just 100 years ago. It was 30 years ago that the United Nations declaration of the rights of children was signed, and later this year the United Nations General Assembly will debate the new United Nations convention on the rights of children.

In retrospect, I believe that the Bill will prove to be one of the most important of this Parliament, for it deals with the welfare of children—with our future. It covers the rights of children, and the rights and responsibilities of parents and of those who care for children. The Bill will also, happily, be seen to be one of the least controversial measures to pass through the Parliament.

The Bill's general philosophy and most, if not all, of its provisions have been welcomed by a wide range of organisations in the field, including the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The House will be aware that I have had the privilege of serving on the central executive committee of the NSPCC for the last nine years.

The events in Cleveland have inevitably focused attention on sexually abused children. The NSPCC figures for 1987, based on 10 per cent. of the register total, show a 21 per cent. increase in registration for sexually abused children. Of course, that does not necessarily mean that there has been an increase in the number of such cases. The problem is that we do not know the full extent; we only know the extent to which cases come to light.

It was interesting that Cleveland, and before that the establishment of Childline, led to a number of adults revealing that they had been abused when they were children. Child abuse is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, I have an interesting report from the director of the NSPCC discussing sexual assaults on children and whether the number is increasing—it is dated March 1925.

Sexual abuse is only part of the problem. Children are also subject to physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and simply being left alone. In 1987-88, the NSPCC dealt with referrals involving nearly 43,000 children, whilst the Department of Health provisional results from the child protection register show that 40,000 children in England need protection from abuse and neglect. That is the extent of the problem that the Bill seeks to tackle. It is important that we get right the legislative framework both for intervention and for dealing with cases after they have come to light.

However, deciding when and how the state should intervene in family life is an extremely difficult and sensitive matter. In Cleveland, perhaps social workers were prone to be too precipitate, while there has been a string of cases from Maria Colwell through to, just before Christmas, the case of Doreen Mason where, alas, social workers acted not at all or too late.

Before I came to Parliament I sat for a number of years as chairman of a juvenile court, and I actually had to make care orders. It is one thing for us to talk lightly in this place

[Mr. Roger Sims]

about children being taken into care: it is another to have in front of one a loving but inadequate mother and her children and to have to decide that it is in the best interests of the children for them to be taken away from the mother and put into care. We have to get such things right. We have to have the correct mechanisms for assessing what is best for the child in care, whether it should be in a children's home, whether it should have foster care, and whether and when it is to be returned to its home.

I welcome the provisions in the Bill affording flexibility in grounds for care, supervision and the new emergency protection order especially allowing intervention where there is "likely to be significant harm" to the child. In such cases, we do not have to wait until harm is actually proved. My hon. and learned Friend will not be surprised, however, if I say that the weapons in the social workers' armoury will still be inadequate as the Bill stands. He is well aware of the case for the assessment order, which was advocated by Louis Blom-Cooper in the Kimberley Carlile case; it was ventilated by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) in a ten-minute Bill about a year ago, and I have also sought to give the matter some publicity. I fear that the powers in the Bill will be inadequate for circumstances in which a social worker is unable to obtain access to a child, and an order requiring that child to be produced would fill that gap.

There is wide support among a number of organisations and practitioners in the field for such a measure, although I am aware that this support is not shared by directors of social services. I believe that their objections are ill-founded. I hope this matter can be discussed more fully in Committee.

I welcome the provision in the Bill for greater rights for children and parents and the involvement of others concerned. I warmly endorse the remarks made about grandparents, and other categories are also involved. For example, what should be the right of fathers in cases where there has been a separation and divorce and the mother has custody? I welcome the improved provisions for the review of cases of children in care, and I am pleased with the timetable for the disposal of cases and the increased use of guardians ad litem. In Committee, we shall need to discuss what exactly is their role, how they can be sure of their independence, and, indeed, who should be appointed guardians ad litem.

We should look, too, more closely at the provision of preventive measures. The NSPCC is, of course, a society for the prevention of cruelty to children. Surely there should be some obligation on local authorities to provide preventive measures. The desirability of such measures is illustrated by the fact that the Minister's Department estimates that about £9 million a year is spent on preventive work. Meanwhile, maintaining children in care is costing about £400 million.

Part of prevention is the provision of day care facilities for children under five years old. This matter should be explored further, for such facilities help the child to develop in a supportive atmosphere and can relieve pressures and tensions in the home that could otherwise lead to abuse.

Members will have received extensive and high-quality briefing from various bodies on a number of issues which I will not go into and which are better discussed in Committee, now that we are subject to the constraints of the ten-minute rule.

In closing, I point out that the NSPCC was founded in 1884, and had its royal charter in 1895. Since 1933 it has had the right uniquely—as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) said—to initiate care proceedings, but it does so only because the legislation states that such proceedings can be initiated by a local authority or "authorised person" as designated by order of the Secretary of State. The NSPCC has been so authorised for 55 years, and has established its credentials beyond doubt. Perhaps it would be appropriate recognition of the work done by this society over 100 years if such authority, rather than being given by regulation, could be written into the Bill.

Although this is a good Bill, aspects of it are capable of being improved and others would benefit from clarification. I look forward to a constructive and fruitful discussion in Committee, from which I hope will emerge an even better Bill.

7.18 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): For many years I have worked for children's rights, so there are several matters that I would like to see included in this important Bill. However, since time is restricted to 10 minutes, I shall confine my remarks to the question of the responsibilities of local education authorities in the matter of the employment of children of school age.

I first began to be concerned about the employment of schoolchildren—in both waged and unwaged work—when I began teaching. Often girls were absent from school because they were caring for younger children, allowing the mother to go out to work when the usual child minding arrangements fell through. Other children's mothers had early morning cleaning jobs or evening jobs, and then my pupils would have the daily responsibility of looking after their younger siblings. Arrangements of this sort had a deleterious effect on their education and their lives. It does not take much imagination to conjure up the pitfalls of such arrangements when emergencies arise.

Most people in this country think that it does children good to do a job to earn a little pocket money, but many times I have tried to teach pupils who are half asleep, having been delivering newspapers since the small hours, in the dark and cold. They had regularly started work much earlier than the legally permitted time of 7 am. My pupils were often afraid of being attacked by dogs or strangers, but they wanted money for their own needs—because it would give them a degree of independence, enable them to buy clothes, and to keep up with their friends. In very poor families, children's pay is often important for the family's very survival.

Most people assume that regulations exist for properly protecting children in employment, but one third of all children in work are subject to accidents. That is a dreadful figure. Sadly, some work is so dangerous that children are killed doing it. Even if children like doing some of the jobs that they do, far too often they are exploited as cheap labour to the benefit of their employers. In theory, sections from eight different Acts govern child labour, but there is no specific legislation, except that relating to entertainment, which says that children aged below five years can work for up to two hours per day, and may attend the

place of entertainment for up to five hours. Some of the charming babies who right hon. and hon. Members see in television advertisements may have been kept working for much longer than the public realise.

In 1973 a private Member's Bill, the Employment of Children Bill 1973, was presented by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer). It passed through all its stages but was never implemented. Its purpose was to introduce a national system giving local education authorities throughout the United Kingdom powers to oversee and control all employment by children in a trade or occupation carried on for profit, whether or not the child received a reward for the work undertaken. Local authorities would have been given powers to demand details of the type of work, place of work and hours worked. They would have been able to prohibit such employment, even if it were not unlawful but appeared to be unsuitable for the child by reference to his age or state of health, or because it would be prejudicial to his education. That Bill was passed in 1973—one and one half decades ago. Times have changed and the proposed penalties for which that Act provides are now very out of date. Increased adult unemployment has brought increased exploitation of children as cheap labour. It is even more vital today that the present patchwork of regulations is replaced by comprehensive, uniform national regulations to protect working children, and that those regulations are given teeth.

I commend to right hon. and hon. Members the booklet "School Age Workers in Britain Today" by Caroline Moorhead, published by the Anti-Slavery Society, which explodes many of the comfortable assumptions that most people make. The harsh fact is that about 2 million children work illegally in this country. No really effective mechanism exists to enforce the existing regulations. That is the task of education welfare officers, but there is only one for every 1,000 children of secondary school age, and so theirs is an impossible job. One authority that has taken the matter seriously is the Inner London education authority, but it is being abolished. In 1987, the ILEA appointed 10 new employment officers and a principal child employment officer to examine the problem.

Children working illegally are unprotected in every way. There is no insurance for them. There is no legal minimum wage for adults, so children's pay is very much less. A survey of children employed in the midlands reveals that some boys and girls work for as little as 30p per hour, but in central London pay can be very much higher. Outside all the safety nets are the increasing number of children living on the streets of London who have lost contact with their families and who are open to all kinds of exploitation and danger.

All Governments have failed to address the problem properly. Clear protective legislation must be put on the statute book to replace the existing mystifying patchwork of regulations that are honoured in the breach, and money must be made available to local authorities so that they can employ more child welfare officers to monitor and enforce the law. The Bill provides an opportunity to put right a dreadful situation. Our children are our stake in the future, and it is our duty to protect them from exploitation of all kinds.

7.24 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) rebuked the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) for reading his speech. I have no notes because I lived through Cleveland, and anyone who lived through that does not need notes to make a speech in the House on that subject.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) and myself—as well as the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who is unwell and unfortunately not present—worked very hard together on the whole Cleveland scenario. Was there ever a child abuse crisis in Cleveland? The statistics show that the number of cases dealt with prior to the advent of Dr. Marietta Higgs was fairly consistent. The graph showed about 30 cases per month. It continued much as it had always done, which is probably true of every other part of the country—be it affluent Buckinghamshire or the less well-heeled areas in the east end of London.

Suddenly, for three months in Cleveland, children were being taken away from their parents—very often on the most specious grounds. It took the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, my hon. Friend and myself to bring that matter to the attention of the House, and for the House to react, before anything was done. One wonders how long that situation would have continued had it not been for the sharp eye of a newspaper reporter who noticed what was happening in the statistics for Cleveland and first raised the matter in a small paragraph in the Middlesbrough *Evening Gazette*.

The Bill now before the House is a consequence of that development. How is it that, from the days of Barnardo and Shaftesbury right through to the present—in future, perhaps the name of Bell will be mentioned—Parliament still cannot get it right? The answer is that we are trying to legislate for human nature, and however hard we try, we shall make mistakes. Parliament will always make mistakes. However, the Bill is a genuine and honest effort, in the light of what has occurred over the past three, four or five years, to put on the statute book legislation that is an improvement on the status quo.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has not only the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) in respect of grandparents but mine as well. In the child sex abuse cases with which I have dealt, I frequently found that the grandparents came off worst. They first lost their own children. In one case, that was because of a suicide. We all know about the situations that arise. When children are taken into care and subsequently adopted, their grandparents—who have done absolutely nothing wrong, and who may have nurtured and loved their grandchildren—are left with no access to them and no rights. They cannot even send their grandchildren a birthday present. That cannot be right in this country today. My hon. and learned Friend had better take that point on board. If he does not, I am sure that the Committee, on which I hope to serve, will make sure that it is taken into account.

That child was taken into care and subsequently adoped. The mother committed suicide. The grandparents had the children of the first marriage; one of the two children of the second marriage had been adopted, and the

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other was with the father. The father did not get on very well with his in-laws, who loved the child but were not allowed access to it.

The father tried to knock down a bus and was killed, so the child was put in care. The grandparents immediately asked if they could bring the child up along with its half-brother and sister, but they were not even allowed access. The child is to be adopted and they will have no rights at all. That is wrong.

A note was passed to me today about another family caught up in the Cleveland child sex abuse case. Three children were taken into care, under the care orders that we are to abolish, following medical examination by the discredited Cleveland doctors. It took the parents more than a year to take the case to court so that they could get their children back. There are two girls and a boy, all alleged by someone to have been sexually abused. That allegation, however, was completely disproved by the courts, and the parents were exonerated.

As a result, the parents have been given back the two eldest children, who are girls; the youngest, a boy, has been forcibly adopted. Those parents have lost their son. But they did nothing wrong. They may not have been the greatest parents in the world, but that is no reason for parents to lose their children. According to the note passed to me today, they have now moved to another part of the country—thanks to the help of one of my colleagues—to start a new life with the two daughters who are left, because they were afraid that they might lose them as well under the present law.

Many case histories have arisen out of Cleveland, as we know from the hon. Members for Ogmore and for Middlesbrough. I am sure that we shall deal with them all in Committee, but we should also examine aspects of the problem that are not dealt with in the Bill, such as the methods used to interrogate small children to determine whether—in someone's opinion—they have been abused. I find it almost incredible that small children have sometimes been faced with full-sized inflatable rubber dolls and, as a result of some action that they may or may not have taken, have been alleged to have been sexually abused.

I agree with those who say that there must be training. People should not be allowed to interfere in families' lives in this way unless they have been properly trained and assessed and we know that they are capable of making the right decision in 90 per cent. of cases. No one, of course, can always make the right decision—no one is perfect—but 90 per cent. is far better than the Cleveland average.

The Bill is only one step towards ensuring that matters continue to improve. As the hon. Member for Middlesbrough said, in Cleveland we are now trying to put all that has happened behind us, and a lead has been given by the Earl of Stockton. Last week three of us went to a disco in Cleveland. It was a Friday afternoon, and 1,700 children were enjoying themselves. That is the sort of image that we want—the image of a loving and caring community. We want to get rid of the image that the Cleveland case created. The Bill will go a long way towards achieving that, and I hope that I will be present to help it.

7.34 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I do not want to follow what was said by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), except to make one comment. The hon. Gentleman asked why Parliament gets it wrong, and answered that it is because we are dealing with human nature, but I do not believe that we are—I do not think that it is in the nature of the overwhelming majority of people to abuse their children. In my view, we are dealing with the behaviour of a minority. Let me say to the hon. Gentleman, and to others who may use that phrase, that whatever the outcome of the Cleveland case—whatever rights emerge from it, and whatever is said in discussion about it—we must not lull ourselves into believing that we have discovered all the cases of child sexual abuse in this country. We must accept the lessons of Cleveland, but we must also plead for more money, research and training for those who deal with such matters, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out.

As has already been said, we are debating the Bill in the context of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. One such right should be a child's right to live with his parents whenever possible, but if that is to happen many parents will need far more support than they receive now, or will receive under the Bill. According to some of the briefing that we have received, children who are taken into care are mainly the children of the poor. I am not sure that that is true. Children who are ill-treated are not necessarily the children of the poor, although such children are often discovered to have been ill-treated because they are already known to the agencies. We would be deceiving ourselves, however, if we believed that children in materially well-endowed homes or in professional homes are not suffering as others are, although they are a minority.

We must also distinguish between children in long-term care and those in short-term care. Many children who go into care leave within six weeks, and often there is no repetition of the difficulties that put them there. In the main, we are concerned with children who go into long-term care. Those children's families—whether they have broken down, are poor, or are cruel—have failed them, as indeed society has failed them.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) blamed what she called the permissive attitudes of Roy Jenkins. I have nothing to praise Roy Jenkins for, but if I could produce one factor that I believe has contributed to the break-up of families it is the current housing policies. The matters dealt with in the Bill must be taken in conjunction with a number of other issues.

Whatever we are talking about, however, we want to keep our children out of care. As Baroness Faithfull so eloquently put it in the other place recently, children who come into care are vulnerable children, they are frightened children, and they are often emotionally disturbed children. They are suspicious, mistrustful, unhappy and usually very lonely. They are not like the children of the family that will care for them if they go into a foster home. I am glad that the 1955 regulation which talks of people treating a child in care as though it were their own has been relaxed. Many children who come into care have contact with their parents, and it is now the policy of many agencies to continue that contact, for various reasons. Of the seven children whom I fostered for many years, only one had no parental contact.

That brings me to a point that was lost in the other place, and I hope that we shall put it back into the Bill. Why should a child in care be subject to any form of corporal punishment? How can people say that such punishment is wrong in a residential home but right in a foster home? According to the survey done in Dartington, 83 per cent. of the children surveyed who were in long-term care had more than one foster placement and 56 per cent. had more than three. What sort of relationship will be built up if we defend the concept of corporal punishment for children in local authority care who are housed with foster parents? The concept that we should encourage parents to pay for their children in care is also wrong. It would be difficult to implement and it might do enormous damage if the parents are poor and already in need.

I referred earlier to the degree of support that will be needed if many of the provisions in the Bill are to work. Some hon. Members have already referred to the sad army of little children who have died as a result of one form of neglect or another—Jasmine Beckford, Kimberley Carlile, Maria Colwell, Tyra Henry and others. I do not know enough about the details of those cases to enable me to suggest what more ought to have been done. If, however, the aim is that children should stay with their families so that families can be kept together, they will need a great deal more financial support than is provided for in the Bill. The families to whom I referred—and many others—broke down because of a lack of the variety of support that is needed by such families. That support is crucial.

Children in care should have the right to complain about their treatment. When this matter was debated in another place the Lord Chancellor said that he would consider providing some means by which children would have a right to complain about their treatment. The Children's Legal Centre and the Voice for the Child in Care have argued strongly in favour of such a procedure. Children in care are vulnerable. They are often frightened about making complaints. A means must be provided by which they can make complaints.

I was glad to receive a letter that advocated that if children run away from home they have a right to be protected and should not be returned to the place from which they came. It has been impossible for me to obtain confirmation from a Government Department that there are 75,000 missing children, but that is the figure that has been given by the Children's Society. The society explained to me in a detailed letter how it had arrived at that figure. If it is accurate, it is an absolute disgrace that 75,000 children and young people are missing. Most of them will be between the ages of 14 and 16. I welcome the statement that safe houses will be provided, but we must find out why such a large number of children disappear from home and what can be done to assist them.

Reference has already been made to young people who leave care. The assistance and support that they need is crucial if they are not to end up on the streets of London —I have seen some of them—begging for support. The suggestion that young girls who have babies in order to get homes should be given the worst possible accommodation is absolutely unbelievable. If we do not want that pattern or cycle of deprivation to be repeated in a few years' time, that is exactly what we must not do. Those young women want homes and protection. They should not be blamed for the situation in which they find themselves.

We should also provide greater protection for children over the age of five who are being cared for after school. The regulations that apply to the employment of people known to have maltreated or abused children do not yet apply to the voluntary sector. I understand that a pilot scheme is being run, but greater protection is needed for children being looked after outside the home, whatever their age may be. That should apply to private fostering, too, which is not adequately provided for in the Bill. More information should also be made available to people who employ private nannies. That is a growing area of abuse.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon), who referred to working children. I have the honour to be chairman of the United Kingdom branch of Defence for Children International, which has published a document on working children as a result of a survey carried out in east London, and I can confirm everything that my hon. Friend said.

Another omission from the Bill that both I and Defence for Children International think should be rectified is the growth in the illegal adoption of children in many parts of Europe. The Council of Europe published a report on that practice. The House must consider how to deal with it before too long.

Although the Bill deals with a number of matters, there are still many omissions which suggest that we need an ombudsman for children and possibly a Minister for children who could deal with all the needs of vulnerable children and make sure that their interests are taken seriously.

7.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Sometimes I wonder whether the British really like children. Some of us sentimentalise them. Some of us, alas, brutalise them. Many of us strive, like parents anywhere, to cherish and nurture them. However, British society has a distressing record of undervaluing its children and young people.

Virtually all the reports of our schools inspectors point to the fact that schools expect far too little of our children. It is typical, but surely it is a source of shame, that this week it has been reported that there is not a single football club in the English League that enables its supporters, most of whom are young people, to play any part in the organisation of the club. Far too often, discussions that directly affect the lives, fortunes and future of children and young people appear to be dialogues between extinct volcanoes while those who are the subject of the dialogues stand on the sidelines, with no involvement and almost totally unnoticed.

I was interested when the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) referred to a children's rights officer. We pay far too little attention to the opinion of children about their lives and future. We have an ambivalent attitude towards parents and families. I welcome the marginally increased scope for grandparents to play their part. However, I believe that the wider family as a whole ought to be more carefully provided for in the Bill. Research shows that placements with relatives are a great deal more successful, on the whole, than other placements. The hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) referred to the Dartington research, which highlighted the fact that many children who are placed in local authority care have several placements.

Fathers have rights, too. The hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) was absolutely right. We shall do women no good service if we assume that in practice they

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will be able to exclude a child's father from access if there is a family break-up. In that context, it is worth asking how many cases of abuse start with stepfathers.

We are making a serious mistake by not proceeding more rapidly with the establishment of children's courts. I have mentioned before to my right hon. Friend the value of the French system. The juge d'enfants is usually much younger than the average judge on the bench. He is a practising solicitor or advocate who leaves his practice for five or six years in order to preside over a special court for children.

I am not confident that a judge's training is the best preparation for making decisions about children. The Kilbrandon principle in Scotland is absolutely sound. The adversarial system may be effective in eliciting the truth. A judge's training allows him to adjudicate, but the adversarial system is appallingly corrosive of human relationships. The sooner that we introduce effective mediation, reconciliation and discussion of the appropriate outcome for a child—a procedure that has made great progress in children's hearings in Scotland—the better.

Turning to day care, when it is perfectly clear that there will be a huge demand for day care from commercial firms and others, I understand the Government's desire to allow a thousand flowers to bloom and for a market place to develop without too much Government interference. I should declare my interest in the British Franchise Association Ltd. I believe that one of the ways forward in the development of day care is to introduce the concept of franchising. One of the advantages of the franchising system is that the franchisor has a commitment regularly to inspect his franchisees to make sure that they are achieving adequate standards. That doubles the amount of inspection because there is private and public inspection. Perhaps it is a good idea to charge companies and large providers of day care a fee for inspection. At present there is a huge bottleneck in the registration and inspection of existing day-care nurseries because of the huge expansion in such provision. The Bill should contain clear criteria as to when day care is not adequate because one of the present problems is that the inadequacies of the criteria make it extremely difficult for people to strike out inadequate day care because nobody knows the grounds on which that should be done.

More day care at every level of income and at every level of provision is absolutely necessary. Day care can give women a genuine choice about their careers, and for single women trying to bring up a family it is indispensable to the family income.

As for social work training, I believe that there still runs through social services departments a clear misunderstanding of the Seebohm report. The concept of the generic social work department has been misinterpreted as a generic social worker. I am appalled that the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work can tell us that social workers are allocated to child care cases in their first year of fieldwork never having undertaken any child care work during their training. That is ridiculous. There is no point in considering pre-entry training in isolation from management practice among employers.

On the question of the resources available to social workers, there is scope for a considerable increase in the number of volunteers who would like to help and who could be useful. I have spoken on the subject before, and I believe the use of volunteers in child care work diminishes the dangers of assault for the social worker whom they accompany, increases the opportunity to visit families at times when it will be unrealistic and unreasonable to expect a statutory worker to attend and allows for the development of friendships between client families and volunteers which would be quite impossible for a professional to allow.

From my own experience and from the observation of others, most children over 16 come home when they want their laundry done and to get a good square meal at weekends. How many children leaving local authority care would love to be able to do that? I believe that there is scope for imaginative development as many older people living isolated and lonely lives would welcome the opportunity to develop a friendship across the generations and perhaps provide laundry or a meal at the weekend in return for friendship. Obviously there are risks involved and that suggestion will have to be considered, but it may prove useful.

We all know that the child is the father of the man and that patterns of parenting are passed down from one generation to the next. The figures provide distressing evidence that my generation has passed down a poisoned chalice. The Bill is the response to the working of that poison and a determined step towards the long-awaited antidote. I thank the Government for producing the Bill and for their willingness to continue to improve it. As many hon. Members have said, there is nothing more important than getting the protection of children in the legal system correct and ensuring as best we can that our families are enabled to bring up their children in ways which will make the Bill unnecessary.

7.54 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I welcome the Bill as a well-thought-out and constructive attempt to remedy an unsatisfactory state of affairs. I also welcome the fact that there has clearly been considerable consultation with various groups that represent children, and their views have been taken into account. I particularly welcome the replacement of the place of safety order with the eight-day emergency protection order, the reasonable access of the parents to the child and the attempt to avoid taking children into care who may have been abused by making arrangements for the abuser to leave home. I reiterate the comment I made in the debate on the Cleveland case. When that is not possible and when a child is taken into care at short notice, arrangements should be made to allow the mother to accompany the child so that the separation of young children and their mothers is not as dramatic and horrendous as it has been recently.

I should like to draw attention to a number of omissions from the Bill, and to some improvements that could be made. I should like there to be a child assessment order whereby the medical inspection of a child at home could take place if there were grounds for concern but they were not sufficient to justify further steps. In the case of Kimberley Carlile who hon. Members have mentioned and who was from the Ferrier estate in my constituency, had such a child assessment order been available to the health visitor who was particulary concerned but unable to insist on a medical inspection, that child would probably be alive

today. While I recognise the difficulties involving liberty, interfering with parents' rights and social workers trying to build up good working relationships with parents, we have to put the child's safety first.

I regret the exclusion of children over five from regulation in regard to child minding, school holiday provision and private fostering. In recent months we have come to regret the lack of safeguards that existed in the past, and we omit those provisions at our peril. We are beginning to recognise that there is an unfortunate group of people in society who gravitate towards children for the wrong reasons. If we allow children to be preyed upon by such people, ultimately we shall find ourselves discussing an emergency Bill following a tragedy. I should like to prevent that instead of waiting for the sacrificial victims.

I shall raise an aspect of the Bill with which I am particularly concerned following recent events in a Greenwich children's home. I should like to make it clear that I am not using parliamentary privilege to describe anything, which is not already known, but simply to use what is happening as an example to show why there should be a crucial change in procedures and in the Bill. The White Paper specifically requested that local authorities should provide a procedure with an independent element for children in care to use if they have a complaint. The specific requirement for an independent element is lost in the Bill and I would like to see it restored.

A number of bodies involved with young children in care have called for its restoration, including the Voice for the Child in Care, the Independent Representation of Children in Need, and the National Association of Young People in Care. All of them have had experiences of children who have become the victims of the social services, rather than being supported by them. Again, I want to make it clear that I am not attacking local authorities or social workers. But I am saying that there have been abuses of children in care by social workers—sometimes by senior social workers. Obviously, it is difficult for the colleagues and employers of such social workers to be the judges of what has happened.

I have a particular example of that in a children's home in Greenwich, where a key worker was disciplined for serious offences and was ordered to be demoted and transferred. Very much against the wishes of the principal of the second children's home, which was for severely disturbed teenaged girls, but on the direct instruction of the director of social services, the worker was placed in the second home. Within a short time, one of the girls in the home alleged that she had been raped.

There is a potential conflict of interest if that case is investigated by the director of social services, who has been responsible for the placement of that employee in that particular home. I am asking for a provision in the Bill that would make it possible for a girl in such a case to ask for an independent investigation. That would not always be necessary because there will, of course, be many more mundane and routine complaints in which ordinary investigations by the local authority concerned would be wholly appropriate. But we must remember, as has already been said today, that those girls are vulnerable and afraid, and have often been severely abused for most of their lives. They do not expect to be believed and if they make an accusation and are not believed they will fear recrimination from the people whom they have accused because they will still be at their mercy. I want such girls and boys to know that if they have a complaint and wish it to be investigated by people who are not responsible for their future maintenance and well-being, they will have someone to whom they can turn.

Several other hon. Members have mentioned today the guardian ad litem system. I want to reiterate the need to strengthen that service and, again, to make it more independent. It is often the case that a social worker in one authority will be a guardian ad litem to the charge of a friend of hers in another authority, or vice versa. There should be some distancing, so that children in need know that there is one person who will be independent of the rest of the network that surrounds them. We must take that seriously. The Children's Legal Centre has said:

> "At present, children in care, unlike every child in the country, cannot go to court under wardship, if their parent —the local authority—mistreats them."

They must have independent and, where appropriate, legal redress.

A new procedure has been initiated in Greenwich and it includes an independent element at the start of the inquiry. However, it states how the progression will go if the complaint is not resolved and it is gradually sucked back into the heart of the social services department. The final opportunity for the complaint to be heard is with a case review within the local authority and the decision of that case review is binding. I would like to see that procedure eliminated so that any children in care who have serious complaints can be sure that they are heard by people who will listen fairly, who will not disbelieve them and who will have no motive for wishing their version of events not to be true. Children need such independent representation.

We are considering cases of potential tragedy. We need to ensure not only that tragedies are unlikely to occur—although they will certainly occur sometimes—but that no longer shall we never know about many of them. Children in care who have been in care for most of their lives, especially those who end up in secure units, have had a difficult life. It is interesting that, following the Cleveland affair, many adults have come forward and explained how they were abused as children but had nowhere to turn. The girls and boys I have described will be in the same circumstances and may be damaged for ever. We must ensure that they have someone to turn to who will give them a fair and independent hearing.

8.4 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I want to join other hon. Members in welcoming the Bill, which has a big job to do. It emphasises the important role of the family and of children within the family, but it also highlights the important role of local authorities. We have seen far too many examples of failure in the performance of local authorities in this area and they must improve their performance. The Bill provides a legal framework in which people can work and it will mean that there will be far fewer excuses for failure of performance in the future.

I want to deal with four aspects of the Bill. My first concern is with the under-fives, a group spoken about at length by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who pointed out the growing demand for services for the under-fives. The growing demand is not being met by facilities sufficient either in quantity or, more importantly, in quality. Parents are demanding higher quality and we should insist on a sufficiently high standard of care for under-fives in particular. In the Bill, the priority

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

should be day care services for under-fives. We have heard examples of provision in the rest of Europe compared to this country and more must be done in the enforcement of standards and the registration of facilities. The Home Office has said that we can expect amendments on those matters and I look forward to seeing them. It is true to say that the character of a child can be largely formed by the time the child is five, so that is the most crucial stage of a child's development in ensuring that matters go well thereafter. The Bill is much concerned with what happens if matters do not go well.

I join with other hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), who have said that they are in favour of assessment orders. I support that and I am much swayed by arguments put forward by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. The objections made to assessment orders are bureaucratic objections. Assessment orders will be much to the advantage of children in the grey areas in which it is difficult to legislate, but in which it is obvious that more powers are needed. The Kimberley Carlile case is an example of a case in which an assessment order was needed. I hope that provision for assessment orders can be brought forward.

In Bolton, we have just had a major investigation into child abuse. Eight children were made wards of court and a further eight children were also involved. One of the parents of the children involved has been in touch with me and he asked me to put it to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health that he should carry out an investigation of the way in which Bolton social services carried out the inquiry. I have written to my right hon. and learned Friend to ask him to consider the need for a full investigation.

There is also great concern in Bolton about the question of juvenile offenders. It is welcome to see the improving trend nationally. The number of children in care has declined from 82,000 in 1983 to 66,000 in 1987. The number of offenders aged 14 to 16 has come down from 114,000 in 1981 to just under 100,000 in 1987 and the number of juveniles in custody has dropped from 8,000 to 4,000.

Although no one wants juveniles to be put in custody —the subsequent careers of those placed in custody are often difficult, with a pattern of continuing returns to custody—there is no doubt that there is a need for places in secure units in cases where discipline has broken down. In Bolton there has been great concern about persistent offenders who have been arrested time and time again by the police. One 14-year-old was arrested 23 times. The police feel that it is most frustrating for them simply to arrest someone who is then allowed to repeat the offence. More care is needed in this area, either to impose the course of last resort, which is to put a child in custody, or to make sure, if that course is not followed, that an effective course is followed whereby the child is kept properly under control.

Today I have received a letter from the clerk to the magistrates court in Bolton, saying that the magistrates in Bolton feel that the court should have extra powers. The clerk said that he would like the present situation to be improved, stating:

> "The situation therefore is that if the Local Authority chose not to submit a report to the Courts, the Magistrates have no power to certify the young offender unruly and he has to be remanded into the care of the Local Authority."

I understand that the court wants a provision

> "to the effect that if the Local Authority is required by the Court to provide a report for the purpose of the Certificates of Unruly Character (Conditions) Order 1977, it shall be under a duty to do so".

I hope that when the Bill is under further consideration, my hon. and learned Friend will give thought to that point so that the Bill can be amended suitably because such provisions would be welcomed.

Problems with children who have not had the right upbringing in their own family can be ameliorated to some extent if they can be placed in the care of a suitable foster family. I encourage more families to come forward to carry out a fostering role, although it is not an easy job at the best of times. When I spoke to Bolton council about this, I was told:

> "This is a tough job, requiring experienced, mature, resilient, sympathetic and unshockable parents".

I call on the Government to reconsider the scale of the fostering allowances available to such parents. Payments to such families can be about £125 per week, but the amount varies from place to place and, generally speaking, falls short of the amount recommended by the National Foster Care Association.

The alternative—a child being placed in a local authority home—is unsatisfactory. A child should be within the love and care of a family and, if not in its own natural family, in a suitable loving and caring foster family. If a child is placed in a local authority home, the cost will be between £200 and £300 per week. If discipline is so lacking that the child has to be placed in a secure centre, I understand that the bill to taxpayers could amount to in excess of £500 or even £1,000 per week. However, it is not so much the cost that we should be concerned about as the fact that that sort of care is so inferior to the proper care that a child needs and its need to be in a family.

I call on the Government to have another look at the scale of allowances provided for fostering to see whether more support could be given to the campaign by the National Foster Care Association for a generous national scheme of adoption and fostering allowances.

Those are my main points in welcoming the Bill. More resources will be needed, but I stress that those resources must be used more effectively by the local authorities in the true interests of the child and of the society in which those children will grow up and become adults.

8.14 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I welcome the general principles encompassed in the legislation but echo points that have been made by hon. Members of all parties that there are several glaring and important omissions. I hope that the Government will be prepared to listen to Members of Parliament during the process of this legislation and amend the Bill accordingly.

It is important to learn the lessons of previous child care legislation and to avoid this legislation being simply a narrow reaction to any particular issue. I am referring, of course, to the Cleveland question. With respect to those hon. Members who are no longer in their places, and who have been concerned with Cleveland, they are doing no service to future generations of children if they see the Bill

as purely and simply a reaction to Cleveland, because a wide range of issues need to be addressed that are not directly concerned with what happened in Cleveland.

I begin by addressing several issues relating to social work practice. I am very much aware of the no-win situation in which social workers find themselves, especially in child abuse cases. I know of that personally because I spent nearly 20 years in social work before becoming a Member of the House. I remember vividly being a team leader in Leeds when one of the social workers for whom I was responsible was responsible for the care of a baby who died at the hands of its mother. I will never forget that case as long as I live because we had to deal with the problems arising from it and to have on our consciences the death of that baby.

I am worried by the fact that some politicians who have spoken in this debate thrive on social worker bashing and have little insight into the problems faced in social work practice, especially in child abuse cases. I do not need to give examples, but perhaps the industrial placement scheme that is used to give Members of Parliament experience in industry should be extended to place certain hon. Members in social services departments because they might then have a different view of the difficulties that are faced every day by those people who work in the social services under the stress that I have experienced personally.

The central dilemma of social work is whether or not to intervene. I have found from past experience in social work that, whatever one does, one ends up in trouble in someone's eyes. Social workers were criticised in the Beckford, Henry and Carlile cases for their failure to intervene, and were criticised in Cleveland for unwarranted intervention. Social workers simply cannot win. On the one hand, they should respect the privacy of family life and the rights of parents and children in their own homes, but on the other hand they must ensure that the children do not suffer serious harm from those same parents or guardians.

From my experience in this place, I would say that there is little understanding of the fact that in some instances there is a need to take a risk with children and to take the decision, "We believe that it is in the best interests of this child to take a risk and to leave the child in its home where we do not think that there are any risks." I am worried that the legislation does not seem to recognise that. Indeed, some hon. Members do not seem to recognise that one of the most precious and important skills in social work is risk-taking. I commend those local authorities which have set up policies and produced detailed written documents stating their set policy on risk-taking and which have said that they will support the risks that occasionally have to be taken where a child is remaining in a home about which questions have been raised.

If social workers did not sometimes take a calculated and properly thought-out risk, every child referred to a social services department, to the NSPCC, to the police or the caring agencies would end up being removed into care, and that is not the answer. I hope that more politicians will understand the need for risk-taking. That is why in addressing myself to some of the Bill's omissions I highlight the fact that there is no mention or recognition of the need for a properly thought out policy on risk-taking in child care and child protection. We should support and encourage local authorities in drawing up such policies.

I should like to highlight another area in which there is a glaring omission from the Bill. I refer to the lack of provision in this legislation or in other legislation for the removal from the home of the alleged perpetrators of an abuse. When working in Leeds I had the experience of removing from their home, on a place of safety order, a 9-year-old girl and her sister on the basis that the 9-year-old girl had made allegations that the mother's co-habitee had had intercourse with her. I recall vividly going to that house to remove the girl's 12-year-old sister on the basis that she too was at risk, along with umpteen policemen, who surrounded the house, and going in and removing not the alleged perpetrator but the child. That was absolute nonsense. The person who should have been removed in those circumstances was the person who was alleged to have done the damage to the child.

We are doing nothing in this legislation about that issue and I earnestly hope that the Government will look in Committee at the possibility of addressing it.

If I had had more time I would have liked to talk about the civil liberties aspect of the issues that concern me in relation to the policing aspects of social work. I have been very worried about the way in which, in some instances, parents' rights have been eroded when case conferences have taken place and the parents have had no right to know what was being said behind their backs. As someone who has been on the practice side and is now a parent, I feel very strongly about that.

I feel that many other issues have been omitted from this Bill, some of which have already been mentioned—for instance, day care provision, the family courts question, the need to look, possibly, at the children's panel system in Scotland, provision for care leavers, the issue of social worker training, which is absolutely essential to proper child care protection, and the proper resourcing of facilities.

It is not possible to push through Bill after Bill, Act after Act, and not increase resources. At the same time as Acts have been passed in the last 10 years—and I could name quite a number of them—resources have been cut by about 20 per cent., so local authorities have fewer and fewer resources with which to deal with the issues they are required to tackle.

Of most importance—and this has not been touched on in any great detail in the debate so far—is the need to examine the real causes of child abuse and what I believe are the wider political issues that have to be addressed. The DHSS guidelines issued last year set the main priorities for child protection as effective surveillance, decisive intervention and individualised assessment. The accepted model of child abuse which is projected by the DHSS and the Government is one of individual pathology. It is a disease model, but it is the individual child, the individual abuse, on which we need to concentrate.

I reject that as an approach to dealing with child abuse because it largely ignores the very important economic and social context in which parenting takes place. There is a grave danger in portraying the skills and responsibilities of parenthood as a private set of activities independent of the social and economic context in which those activities take place. As other hon. Members have said, there is a need to address the question of poverty. One third of all children live in low-wage, low-income households or very-low-income households.

We must also address the question of preparation for parenthood. I have two children. I was never prepared for

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

parenthood in any way. The education system has not prepared me and I suspect that that is the case with many other hon. Members. What do we do to prepare young people for the parenthood about which we romanticise? We encourage young people to get married and become parents but give them little guidance about the problems one faces as a parent.

I would argue in particular that nowhere is the individual pathology model more questionable than with regard to sexual abuse. If hon. Members are interested in looking at the research on this issue, I would commend the work being carried out at the moment by Christine and Nigel Parton in west Yorkshire. In a paper to be published shortly, Christine Parton makes the point that:

"The roots of child sexual abuse are not so much in deviant family and sexual values but in normal ones."

The essential point that she is making, with which I concur, is that the sexual norms and values of society lead directly to child abuse.

I should like to give the House a few examples before I sit down.

We have a society in which judges excuse men who have had sex with children on the basis that their wives were pregnant. Judges excuse that kind of behaviour. That says something about our values. We have women blamed for male sexual violence—women, not men. The Cleveland report gave the impression that the responsibility for protecting children from male sexual violence was the mother's, not that men in society should address these issues.

What we need in this place is more working-class mothers, not more lawyers; we have heard lawyers all night, with all due respect to some of them, who have made good speeches. We need more working-class mothers who have had experience of the problems of bringing up children on low incomes and of many of the issues that are faced in parenthood.

We need to address in particular male socialisation, sexual attitudes and expectation of women and the portrayal of women in society. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) made some very important points about how women are portrayed in the media. It would be a good starting point to stop women being portrayed as they are in the tabloid press because it creates in men a certain expectation of women. These are issues that we need to address.

I have said that I broadly welcome this legislation, but it is important to make it clear that a simple legal tidying-up measure will not resolve the very deep and serious questions concerning the welfare of children about which we are all concerned. We need to tackle the political and moral issues that should be addressed in this situation. We need to tackle the question of how men treat women and how rich treat poor in our society. Above all, we need to tackle the moral bankruptcy, selfishness and greed that have underpinned the political example set by the present Government over the past 10 years.

8.25 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I very much welcome this Bill and the opportunity to speak in what is a very important and, speaking for myself, fascinating debate to have sat through and listened to.

There can be very few issues as private and sensitive as the question of child care. Parents pride themselves on knowing best how to bring up their children. They resent any intrusion into or criticism of that activity. I suppose it is only criticism of one's driving style that can be taken as personally or is as likely to give such offence as criticism of how one brings up one's children.

For those of us who dearly love and cherish our children, as I am sure all of us in the House do—my children are the very reason that I come to this place—it is indeed difficult to comprehend the attitude of mind of parents and others who wilfully, and often with premeditation, set out to abuse and ill-treat innocent and helpless children. We run the risk of judging others by our own standards because there can be very few parents who at some stage in parenthood have not felt their self-control beginning to slip and have stopped just in time before slapping a bit too hard or using language that is a little too strong. Such incidents, of course, are followed instantaneously by horror and self-rebuke, but those actions are the nearest we can come as loving parents to understanding the sorts of situation that give rise to the problems behind this Bill.

From the debate so far this evening it is clear that there are a number of unresolved issues, many of which have been the subject of undertakings by the Lord Chancellor in the other place to introduce amendments in this House. I look forward to them and I want to address myself to a few of them. First, however, I wish to deal with one or two other aspects of the Bill.

A point has been raised about the Bill moving firmly towards increased parental responsibility. I welcome that. We hear a great deal these days about rights but much less about the responsibilities which must go with those rights. The Bill sets out to balance that responsibility about the primary interests of the child. Furthermore, the Bill is written in language which is clear to all involved in child care. It makes it a lot easier for those of us who are not lawyers to understand what the Bill is saying. It may not be quite up to the standards of a plain English award but the Government should be congratulated on producing a piece of legislation which will be easily understood by all those who have to implement it as well as those who may hope to serve on the Committee and understand the amendments.

I particularly welcome the changes in what are currently called custody orders, which are to be replaced by residence orders, contract orders and the like. There can be very few of us who have not been through a divorce or have not got a close relative or friend who has. The tug of war that can take place between parents who are divorcing will often destroy the last vestiges of trust and security for the children caught in the middle. The proposals in this Bill make it quite clear that the responsibilities of parenthood are not to be monopolised by one parent or to be thrown away by another like some discarded empty bottle. Once a parent, always a parent, and with that goes parental responsibility.

Some issues which have been debated in the other place are still to be resolved. There were attempts by some noble Lords to amend the proposals for parents to withdraw their children from voluntary care without notice. The Lord Chancellor rejected those amendments, but I hope that they can be given more attention during the Bill's passage in this House. We should understand—again, there is the risk of judging others by our own standards

—that although the vast majority of reasonable, sensible parents would give notice, a tiny minority, perhaps even drunk, might, on the spur of the moment, turn up to retrieve their child, regardless of whether he wishes to go, whether he is awake or asleep, or whether the other parent agrees with the action. Obviously, we do not want to discourage parents from using voluntary care—it is a sensible objective—but we must look at that matter again. A useful article in *Social Work Today* referred to that point.

In his opening remarks, my hon. and learned Friend referred to the harbouring of those who have run away from home or from local authority homes. There is still a point to be cleared up, and I hope that we can get some clarification. When the Lord Chancellor replied to the debate in the other place, he referred to safe houses and said that amendments would be introduced in this House along the lines of what was in the White Paper. The sentences in the White Paper are acceptable to everybody. I do not have time to read them, but they are contained in paragraph 50 of the White Paper. What is slightly confusing is that they appear under a heading concerned with local authority homes. I hope that the arrangements to permit the Children's Society to continue its work will not be restricted to those who have run away from local authority homes.

On 20 December 1988 the Lord Chancellor announced that amendments will be forthcoming to the Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act 1948. We are still awaiting them, and we have heard the reasons for the delay. However, the problems go much further than simply reforming that Act. Many factors now point towards a need for a full policy on the care of children by people outside the family when the children are not at school. Obviously, such a policy should not be a straitjacket, nor should it impinge on the parental responsibilities that we are rightly enshrining in the Bill. The matter overlaps the responsibilities of the Department of Education and Science.

We cannot escape the fact that more and more women want and expect to return to work soon after childbirth. However wrong I as an individual might think that that is —I make no bones about it; it is wrong—I have no right to make that judgment for others. We know that there is a great lack of day care facilities, whatever the form of pre-school care and even out of school hours care, for children aged over five.

In the debate on clause 16 in the other House, proposals were made to require local authorities to provide day care for all under-fives. The Lord Chancellor resisted that, and I hope that my hon. Friends will continue to resist it. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), who assented to one of my earlier comments, will not agree now. I do not think that the right way forward is to require local authorities to do that. It must be remembered that there is a substantial voluntary sector which must be harnessed and enhanced. There are ways in which it can be improved. I do not pretend that it is perfect. There is a need for greater professional training and greater control and regulation of those involved. That is the way forward. That is the way we should set out our stall.

Putting young children into a local authority system which, by its nature, is bound to be somewhat institutionalised is not the right way forward. If we can involve the voluntary sector even more than it is at the moment we will also involve parents. That is significant. If we can involve the parents at that stage, it will set a pattern for their involvement throughout their children's schooling. The Government have been trying to do that with other legislation. That environment needs to be regulated and supplemented by local authorities. Let us not have the blanket approach which was suggested this evening.

I shall return to those points if I am fortunate enough to be selected to serve on the Standing Committee. It is a great pleasure to be able to take part in a debate which is not full of political hype. We have heard a few highly party political comments, but the debate has not contained the political hype and propaganda which characterise many debates in this place. I am sorry that more hon. Members have not been present to hear the debate. They would understand that this is the House of Commons at its best. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak about such an important Bill.

8.35 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the debate about the law relating to children. We should remember that this is not just a post-Cleveland Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said. It is far more general and covers a longer perspective than that. Many aspects of the Cleveland debate are disturbing, such as the way in which the popular newspapers rushed to judgment against individuals and used it as a general attack on social workers. People made instant responses to matters which they could barely have had time to investigate.

Anyone who has examined the traumas, the unpleasantness and the sordid side of the abuse of children in our society will know that the most difficult decisions are often those which must be made by welfare workers of any description—social workers, the police and many others. They are all extremely difficult decisions. Whatever one does, one gets it wrong, because one is wrong in somebody's eyes. The only thing to do is to err on the side of protection of the child. If one gets that wrong, one will obviously lose everything in the long run. It is an extremely difficult matter. I hope that there will be some caution in attitudes towards social workers in future and that there will not be cheap attacks on them by press reporters who have not bothered to understand the difficulties in which they must work in the first place.

I shall concentrate on day care provision for under-fives. Although some hon. Members have mentioned it, it has not been referred to extensively. There is an awful lot of idealising about bringing up children. There is the ideal of the nuclear family in the semi-detached, three-bedroomed house with a garden in some pleasant suburb, who are always available to ensure that children have a decent upbringing. For many children that is not the case. The reality of life for many children in our society is not growing up in that sort of environment; it is growing up in an overcrowded flat, sometimes shared with other families, in a high-rise development with little open play space. Even if there is open play space, parents are afraid of children using it unless they are supervised. If there is no supervision and parents are unable to go out and look after their children, there is no play for them.

Many children are growing up in such environments. Many children are growing up in poor environments.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

Without dramatising what I am saying, many children are not getting enough to eat, and, in many cases, not of the right food, because their families are so hard-up.

The problem of child poverty was serious in 1979, and it is catastrophic in 1989. I ask Conservative Members who willingly and slavishly supported the Government's economic policies over the past 10 years to look to themselves on the 10th anniversary of Thatcherism and consider the lot of many children in our society and the resurrection of malnutrition and diseases which many thought had been banished after the slump of the 1930s. That is the consequence of a slavish endorsement of the market forces argument and market forces policies.

Clause 16 deals with the provision of day care for children. One welcomes it. At least we have something in legislation. Clause 16 states:

"Every local authority shall provide such day care for children in need within their area who are—

(a) aged five or under; and

(b) not yet attending"

primary schools managed by local education authorities "as they consider appropriate".

Obviously, I, along with anybody else with any sense, welcome the fact that that there is to be day care provision for children in need. I take issue with the fact that we have a narrow definition of children in need as a requirement for a local authority to provide day care, and in doing so we are saying that other children who are not within that narrow definition will not receive day care.

When one starts to question what is available in day care provision, one is horrified. When visitors from overseas come to my community in Islington, those who are interested in local authority matters or social problems often ask about day care provision. The borough of Islington scores pretty well in the national average in its provision of community day nurseries, play centres, nursery schools and classes, playgroups and many other forms of informal day care. It scores well because the Inner London education authority and the borough of Islington give a high priority to day care provision. Yet even now the borough is under-funding many services. The borough and I both recognise that. There is a long waiting list for day nurseries. It is almost impossible for many parents to get their children into day nurseries.

The 1976 Select Committee report on the problems of children recommended a massive increase in the provision of day care facilities. I understand that the Prime Minister, when Secretary of State for Education and Science, made a rash promise of 700,000 places for the under-fives. We are still a long way short of that. Indeed, we have very poor provision.

The differences throughout the country in the provision of nursery places for children aged three to five are astonishing. Some local authorities manage as high as 85 per cent. Others, such as West Sussex, are below 10 per cent. Is that caring for the under-fives, or is it saying that we will throw the problem back to the parents and ignore the fact that many of them may be living in unsuitable accommodation and cannot afford to send their children to private nurseries?

Provision in the United Kingdom is very poor. The statistics provided by the House of Commons Library show that the number of places available in local education authority nursery schools and classes for the zero-to-four population is only 9·4 per cent. I realise that not all children under four are eligible. One might argue that only children aged three and four should be eligible. One finds that local authority day nurseries provide only 32,000 places in the whole country.

The changes in the past few years show an even more astonishing position. One would have hoped that, with the growing recognition of the need for children to be able to go to good day care facilities, such facilities would have expanded, but there has been hardly any expansion. Between 1985 and 1987, places in local authority day nurseries did not increase at all. There was only a substantial increase in the number of children in registered places with child minders. I applaud the work of child minders, but many local authorities and child minders recognise that that is not the ideal answer, because better facilities are needed for children to extend themselves and to develop their individuality and personality.

When we compare the provision of local authority and other pre-school facilities in this country with the provision in other countries in Europe, we see what an appalling mess it is in. If West Germany can manage 60 per cent. provision for children aged three to five and if Spain can manage 66 per cent. provision, why can Britain manage only 44 per cent.? Because of political will and political priorities, the Government do not regard it as important to provide those facilities.

Where there is local authority provision, in some cases it is expensive—indeed, sometimes, prohibitively so. Where parents are sending children to private day nurseries and private pre-school provision of various sorts, the cost is astronomical. I spent part of yesterday at a National Union of Students conference on the provision of day care for the under-fives. The delegates were asked about the cost of nursery facilities provided in institutions of higher education. It is important that nursery facilities are provided in such institutions. If they are not, how can women get back into education? All institutions of higher education are pleading with women to come back. The cost of nursery facilities may be as high as £70 per week, which is totally prohibitive for poor women.

I make one simple plea. I hope that an amendment will be moved in Committee, and accepted, to introduce a statutory requirement for the provision of pre-school educational places, be they nursery, day care or whatever. There should be proper monitoring of the facilities nationally. We should not forget that we are ignoring the real needs of a large number of children who are living in great poverty, distress and difficulty, and who cannot experience the joy of socialising with other small children, of learning how to play together and of developing properly. We are starting discrimination in the cradle because of the Government's economic policy and the lack of social provision for children.

8.45 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): When the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) spoke of Cleveland, my mind's eye filled with the picture of a small boy, returned home to his parents, who sat silently, withdrawn into himself, refusing to speak to anyone, staring straight ahead. His mother, who was worried sick, said that he had had 14 or 15 nightmares that week but that he refused to say anything. He had been seen by Dr. Higgs, warded, and later de-warded and sent home. I

cannot recall whether he was one of the children who were carried off by social workers late at night, perhaps at 2 o'clock in the morning. Anyway, he had been taken away under a place of safety order obtained from a magistrate who worked in a local hospital. He had not been abused sexually but he was abused by the system. So, too, were all the other children who were taken away in Cleveland in 1987. So were the two men who committed suicide. So were the families who were irreparably split by allegations made in that great wave of zealotry.

I recall specifically a man arriving on my doorstep with a letter telling me what had happened to him and his family. He came along on Sunday, 14 June, two days after I was elected to the House. That letter was impossible to comprehend. We assume that such things cannot happen in a civilised society. Here was a professional man, well able to safeguard his own interests, totally crushed by a system of law and so-called welfare which had completely removed all his rights and responsibilities.

This welcome Children Bill will immeasurably improve the position. We have to legislate for all our children, and for the sake of all our children. Millions of children live normal, happy lives. However, each year thousands are injured, abused or neglected by adults. For the sake of my constituents and the community at large, we must go further than the provisions of the Bill.

The Bill is an excellent one for simplifying the law, and for defining properly the rights and responsibilities of parent and child. It is long overdue that the declaration of the rights of the child 1959 and the European convention on human rights should find expression in English law. The sweeping away of the long discredited place of safety order will also receive a wide welcome, as will the introduction of the emergency protection order and the simplification of the provisions relating to wardship and guardianship.

Careful consideration must be given in Committee to various points such as notification about emergency protection orders, the training of social workers, the under-fives, written agreements relating to children in care and especially the independence of guardians ad litem. If the Government wish, I will gladly serve on the Committee to support them in dealing with all those matters.

It is crucial always to hold in mind what we are about fundamentally. We are seeking the best welfare for the nation's children because a halfway house will not do. It is not sufficient to build the front half of the vehicle to Rolls-Royce standards and then try to weld a Skoda body at the back. Unfortunately, that is what the Government are seeking to do by refusing to follow the logic of their own arguments all the way to a system of family courts.

I have no doubt that, in framing his reply, the Solicitor-General has already thought of a quip about Rolls-Royce costs, but this matter is too serious for quips. Perhaps we should consider not whether we can afford a system of family courts, but whether we can afford not to establish one.

The Finer committee on family law reported in 1974. Fourteen years later, no argument against the system proposed has yet been advanced. Fourteen years have elapsed, with no progress. To put that time in context, it is fair to say that in the past 140 years, since the Infants Relief Act*1874, there has been an average gap of nine years between major pieces of legislation relating to children. The last and the most important Act was the Children and Young Persons Act 1969. The Minister said that he thought it would be a long time before another such piece of legislation came before the House.

If we profess to be the party of the family, we can hardly be prepared to wait another nine years to establish family courts. If we read the Bill thoroughly, we can see that it is almost as if the new system is already presumed to be there. The present structures are plainly inadequate to deal with the new law that is proposed. We need a non-adversarial system of law in family matters. We need compulsory reference to conciliation in many cases of family break-up. In New Zealand, for instance, where all divorce cases are referred to conciliation, after conciliation 19 per cent. of couples resumed the marriage, 39 per cent. reached full understanding, 16 per cent. came back for further guidance, but only 26 per cent. reached no agreement. Consider the savings that would be made in legal aid under that system.

Passive child abuse, such as allowing a child to view pornography or adult acts, might be prevented at an early stage and on a low-key basis by a simple reprimand from a court guidance counsellor, backed, as he would be, by the full authority of the court.

In order to speed up court cases, there must be a mechanism to introduce cases at the most appropriate level of court as soon as possible. I urge the Government to enhance the system, which was pronounced by the Finer committee and adopted in New Zealand, by including a judge as the chairman of the court in a way similar to industrial tribunals. The judge and tribunal should have power to call witnesses, to call for evidence and to instruct that parties be represented.

I find it quite unbelievable that in this country one must go to a judge to seek an interim injunction—and give undertakings in damages and other matters in case one is wrong—in order to freeze a man's bank account, yet in order to take his children away one only has to go to a magistrate and say that one has a suspicion that the child might be in danger. That shows how this country has its priorities so terribly wrong. I look forward to the Bill putting that priority right.

I respectfully submit that it is not sufficient to remove the most obvious shortcomings of the present system. The real point is that, in order to make sure that the system provides justice, we need a root-and-branch reform of the court system. I suspect, in the words of Mark Antony, that "I tell you that which you yourselves do know."

This is a good Bill. It has the potential to become a great milestone in the history of child care law. The potential lies in clause 67, which the Lord Chancellor described in the other place as a "marker" to be eventually much more extensive in its effect. If that is not the case, the provisions of the Bill will be too strong for the court system that it will have to work within. It would be a great mistake and a tragedy for our people if this reform were to be presented half-finished.

The Lord Chancellor has sent us a well-drafted and cohesive Bill. When introducing it elsewhere, he showed that he represented all that is best in our party. His intention is to leave the country with an enduring mark of its compassion for the most unfortunate and vulnerable people in our society.

We should bear in mind the image that I conjured of a child who was shattered by what has happened to him. Whether that child's life was ruined by state intervention,

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

by abuse or by divorce, it is imperative that we recognise that no provision is too good or too expensive for us to enact.

A hundred years after Lord Shaftesbury campaigned for better working conditions for children, we still remember him. We can emulate his reputation with this Bill. I should be very surprised if the Government were to grant my request tonight. All I seek at this stage is an undertaking from the Solicitor-General or from the Government that they will consider whether the Bill can be the vehicle for a comprehensive reform of the law on children by introducing family courts. That should be considered carefully before the Bill leaves the House. Many hon. Members, and concerned people and organisations outside, agree that we now need a family court. I ask the Solicitor-General and the Government to give us the tools and let us finish the job.

8.54 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I, like many other hon. Members, welcome the opportunity to participate in the Second Reading of this important Bill, which touches on some of the most emotional and sensitive issues in our society. I am sure that we all agree that it is difficult for any statutory framework to deal effectively with complex human relationships, especially those within families.

Shortly after my election to the House, the Cleveland issue was highlighted. I felt at that time that it would have been wrong of me to intervene, because my intervention, however well-intentioned, would have been made without all the facts. However, I had the distinct impression that the emotions aroused boiled over. That may have been natural, indeed unavoidable, but that also effectively underlines the need to deal sensitively with matters affecting children. Despite my earlier remarks, we must have a statutory framework that takes into account so far as possible the experiences of recent events.

Prior to my election to the House, I was a practising solicitor and I had had some experience in general practice of dealing with family law. I welcome in broad terms the provisions of the Bill that deal with custody and access on marriage breakdown. The removal of the terms "custody" and "access" and any steps that remove the conflict in such cases and make it easier for parties in marriage breakdowns or in the breakdown of family relationships to resolve their difficulties should be welcomed. Many of us who have been advocates in such matters have seen time and time again the terrible situation of children being used as emotional blackmail in family disputes. Unfortunately, many were in such a serious situation that they saw the gaining of custody of the children as a prize to be won in legal proceedings and did not consider that the interests of those children should be given paramount consideration. Therefore, anything that goes towards removing such a conflict should be welcomed.

The amendments to the care proceedings are very much overdue. The historical piecemeal approach to the law relating to children was much to be deprecated. Over many years, we saw provisions in the Children Act 1975 fail to be implemented time and time again. The courts were hampered, because they had inadequate provisions to deal with those matters effectively, although some of them were already on the statute book.

The rights of parents to be parties in care proceedings are important. I have never understood why that has not been introduced earlier. In care proceedings, of course, the child is represented, and on many occasions I myself have represented children. However, the parents have a large and important interest, too. They should be heard and should not simply be interested parties.

The creation of emergency protection orders is welcomed. The eight-day initial order will meet some of the objections of the place of safety orders, and will give parents rights to challenge after 72 hours. That has resource implications, not least for the legal aid fund. I hope that the Government will allow sufficient resources to be made available to the legal aid authorities to ensure that parents and children, and all the other interested parties, can be properly and legally represented, where necessary. I also welcome the tighter timetable for interim care orders contained in the Bill. I am sure that the Solicitor-General is aware of the old maxim "delay defeats justice", but where children are concerned that delay is even more intolerable.

This has been a fruitful debate. Much has been said about how to strike the right balance between acting quickly to prevent abuse and identifying those cases where intervention would not be justified. We all agree that we cannot legislate for perfection. However welcome the new provisions may be, we also need to encourage the agencies involved in such decisions—social workers, doctors, the police, voluntary bodies and, on occasions, probation officers—to work closely together. Because there are misunderstandings between those agencies and, let us be honest, jealousies, tragedies can occur. We all have a responsibility to ensure that the voluntary agencies outside the framework of the law work effectively together.

In common with other hon. Members, I believe that there are some omissions from the Bill. The most glaring is the failure to introduce family courts. I welcome the provisions in the Bill so far as they go and, as the Minister of State said earlier, some people see them as the means to set up embryonic family courts. I welcome the establishment of family panels as part of the system in magistrates courts. Juvenile courts were never the right place to deal with children involved in care proceedings, and family panels will now address some of the relevant issues.

The right answer is the establishment of family courts, but, despite the overwhelming support of hon. Members and interested organisations for their introduction, the Government appear to be determined not to introduce them. I fail to understand why, unless it is because of a lack of resources. I commend the words of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) who said that it was not a case of whether we could afford them, rather that we could not afford not to have them.

Family courts are important because the adversarial nature of magistrates courts, and sometimes of other courts, destroys the possibility of any decency in the proceedings. That adversarial nature does a disservice to family law, and we must reconsider the introduction of family courts. The aim of family law should be to resolve conflicts without bitterness. One cannot remove bitterness entirely, but it can be significantly reduced.

The Solicitor-General and other Front-Bench spokesmen will be aware that concern has been expressed about the resource implications of the Bill. The Association of Directors of Social Services is particularly concerned

about the resource implications for training and the appointment of guardians ad litem and so on. The Government should not delay the introduction of the Bill's major provisions because of lack of cash; rather, they should make it clear that the resource implications will be met in full. There should be no skimping.

I also trust that amendments will be made to the Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act 1948 in relation to private nurseries. An undertaking was given about that in the other place and I trust that the Government will act upon that in Committee. Yesterday, I led a delegation to see the Lord Chancellor whom I admire. He is an honest and sincere man who listens carefully to the points put to him.

The Bill is welcome in so far as it goes, but it could go much further. We all have the responsibility to make the Bill into an Act which is a true children's charter. I hope that the Government will respond positively to any constructive idea proposed to strengthen the Bill during its passage through the House.

9.4 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Earlier I was struck by the remarks made by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who is a lawyer specialising in children's law. He drew attention to the extraodinarily complex and confusing nature of the law which surrounds children in our society. I believe that the Bill, with its 83 clauses and the wide range of issues that it attempts to encompass, is a further reflection of the complexity of that law.

The complexity in the law has arisen largely because we tend to think that children have different rights from adults. Having read the Bill, I have the distinct impression that children are still viewed as the property of parents rather than as individual citizens in their own right. I accept that they do not vote and that they are small and often inarticulate, but by definition they are people. In our anxiety for their welfare we sometimes lose sight of that fact, and we have set up institutions that have impinged upon children's rights.

Adults may not be subjected to physical medical examinations against their will, but in Cleveland children were subjected to inspections which almost amounted to abuse. There were not only inspected, but photographed in that act by third parties. They were subjected to appalling humiliation, but because they were small and inarticulate they were deemed suitable for such treatment. That is awful.

When we take a child into care, what we are really doing is inflicting compulsory custody on the child. That cannot be inflicted upon us as adults unless the police have a good case against us. Even then, we are protected by the writ of habeas corpus and the police have to bring the case before a court within seven days. A child may be taken away and held for 28 days before the relevant order comes back to the magistrates courts for extension. Again the child is treated in a lesser capacity than an adult. When the child is suspected of being abused it is removed, but the abuser is often left in the family home. The child is subjected to a trauma which should perhaps rightly be inflicted on the person suspected of perpetrating the crime. Instead, however, the victim is taken away. That represents another trauma on top of the abuse already suffered.

I question some parts of our social security system. If one studies the cases of physical abuse against children, one often discovers that the children were in happy foster homes but were then reclaimed by their mothers, who were setting up homes with new partners. The children represented points in the housing game. In other words, the child is taken back not because it is wanted but because it is a valuable commodity. In *The Lancet* this week a paediatrician described a case in which parents refused treatment for a handicapped child because they believed that the operation, which the paediatrician thought necessary, might end the child's life. In the paediatrician's words, the child was worth £200 to the household in allowances. Again, the rights of the child were subjugated to the financial interests of the adults.

I could go on, but time is limited. My point is that the Bill tends to perpetuate the idea that powers given to professional workers to protect children are necessarily a good thing. I do not think that that is always so. The hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) stressed the need for children to have an outside, independent source to whom they can speak. She pointed out that several children's organisations support that idea. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) pointed out that when the Bill was going through the House of Lords, that principle was rather lost. I wish to reinforce the idea that it should be included, and that the point should be made very strongly.

I should like to see emphasis placed again on what I would call the natural neighbourhood networks of protection for children—the teacher, who often suspects that something is wrong; the neighbours, who perhaps do not report things as much as they used to because the social worker is supposed to be doing that job; health workers, who often know a lot more about what is going on but perhaps tend to refer cases to the so-called professionals in the field. I should like to see the police involved to a much greater extent because they are not only trained in these matters but also circumscribed in their activity by very specific parameters. They cannot take people away and lock them up for 28 days without producing them in the courts. I hope that, as the Bill goes through its Committee stage, more emphasis will be placed on the need for the community to keep an eye on and take charge of its children.

I was struck by one thing in the admirable book written by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) about the Cleveland case. An experienced paedietrician—talking about the so-called disclosure sessions at which children were almost bullied into giving the evidence that the social worker wanted in order to carry the case forward—pointed out that children very rarely tell lies in these cases, that most children are truthful, and that if one listens to them one gets the truth. I hope that as the Bill goes through its various stages a great deal more attention than is currently being shown will be given to children as independent citizens with the right to speak up in their own defence.

9.12 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): This Bill is a landmark in children's legislation. Many burning issues and many needs will be brought to the surface during its passage. Some of those needs will be met, and many of the issues will be passionately debated, but, however good the provisions of the Bill turn out to be, however good the law,

[Mrs. Llin Golding]

all the passion and all the debate will have been to little purpose if the training needs of those who have to implement it are not met.

Children have special needs. Their whole future is finely balanced. So much depends on the knowledge and accurate judgment of the professional people involved. Doctors, nurses, lawyers, police, teachers, carers, the clergy all become involved with children in need of care and protection. But central in this area of child care and protection are the social workers. It is in their hands that the needs of children at risk are placed. Their knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of other professional groups is so important in helping these children and their families. On their shoulders is often placed the ultimate responsibility for success or failure.

The evidence from two Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work surveys—"Protecting Children" and "The Law Report"—indicates that students are leaving their one-year and two-year qualifying training ill-equipped to handle child care protection work. As has already been mentioned, some students receive their qualifications without ever having worked on a child care case. In May of last year the Government rejected the council's proposal that social workers' basic training be extended by a year. This would have allowed time both for basic training and for specialist training in any one of a number of fields, including child care. The Government have recognised the need for remedial training for existing social workers. They should supply the money that is necessary for basic and specialised training not only for social workers who deal with children but for all those who deal with children. I quote from the explanatory and financial memorandum:

"The full annual cost of the Bill will . . . be between £4 million and £11 million of which £4 million will fall to local authorities and between £0 and £7 million to courts administration and legal aid. There may also be one-off training costs for local authority staff training."

The memorandum also says:

"None of the other provisions of the Bill is likely to have substantial financial effect. The sponsoring departments may have to make modest provision for monitoring the effects of the changes."

That is not good enough. More money should be—must be—provided. Our hopes for this Bill rest with those people who have to implement its provisions.

In conclusion, I have to say that we as legislators cannot sit back and think that we have done our duty by children in passing a Children Bill if we do not include in it provision for training and for monitoring its effects. Children are our future and the future of this country; we should not be counting pennies when counting the cost of our duty towards them.

9.16 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I am most grateful for the opportunity to intervene briefly in the debate on this Bill, which I welcome. I reinforce strongly all that my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) have said during the course of the debate.

I want to emphasise the need to give grandparents rights under this Bill. I refer to a constituent of mine—the grandmother of two young children—who wrote to me saying:

"At all times up until September 1988 I enjoyed access to the children, with whom I had a very good relationship. I was then notified by the council"—

I should say that the council referred to is not my own local authority—

"that they were terminating my own access rights, which they had allowed me up until then . . . I understand from the barrister who has advised that there is currently a gap in the law that means that, as a grandmother, I have no clear rights to commence proceedings against [the council] to enable me to take up access. Clearly, I take the view very strongly that there is some fault in the law."

As many hon. Members have said, that fault is very clear. I should be grateful if the Solicitor-General, in his winding-up speech, would make clear very precisely what rights grandparents have under this Bill. What locus will they have in the various proceedings that are spelt out? Will legal aid be available to grandparents to enable them to take proceedings if they so wish?

This debate takes place against the background of child benefit having been frozen for a considerable period—perhaps the most major attack against children and families in this country.

Let me cite another part of the background against which the debate takes place. In the city of Bradford, which I have the honour to represent, children are the victims of a vicious campaign of Conservative dogma, which clearly represents the worst aspects of extreme Thatcherism. There are 9,000 school children whose parents are either unable or unwilling to pay school meal charges, which have almost doubled since last October. There have been major cuts in the funding of the voluntary sector, and these have hurt organisations serving children and families. I think that the meanest of those cuts relate to toys and equipment supplied to child minders in the district.

I think of the single parent with three young children who is buying a house, described as being in a shocking condition, on a rental purchase scheme at 22 per cent.-plus interest. She is a young, vulnerable and quite inarticulate woman, the youngest of whose three children suffers from epilepsy. I have a letter from the citizens advice bureau in Bradford, which has been trying desperately to assist her. It says:

"I am still trying to get money through another community care grant for repairs which Environmental Health deem necessary and for which a nine day order has been issued. Again I find it unacceptable to be told by Social Fund Officers 'to put a lock on a cellar door' as an answer to sewerage and silt problems in the cellar; and to their apparent naivety or possibly unwillingness to respond to matters of urgency. It is now Friday. The order was issued last Friday. Three telephone calls to DSS, one application form explaining the urgency and now another letter has gained no response other than flimsy excuses and insensitive suggestions."

That is the reality of the attack that is being made on children and families in Bradford.

We know that 2 million children live in poverty or near the poverty level. In Bradford, many children are living in poor, overcrowded homes. They go to old under-equipped schools, badly in need of repair and renovation, and live in communities which lack basic community facilities, are run-down and strewn with litter, graffiti, waste and rubbish. Is it any wonder that 15-year-olds now represent a major criminal class in Britain?

The Government's response is to threaten to punish still further the parents of those children rather than dealing with the cause of the problem which, as has been said so

often today, is the problem of poverty, deprivation and disadvantage, which can be so starkly seen in Bradford and other inner cities in Britain.

The Prime Minister does not believe in society. But after 10 years of Thatcherism, the need for our nation's wealth to be shared more equally is more urgent than ever before. It is all very well to build a framework which we hope will protect children more effectively than has been the case in the past, but the Bill will be no more than words on paper unless we ensure that Britain's children and families receive a fair share of the wealth that they have been creating over the years.

9.21 pm

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): We have had an interesting and wide-ranging debate. We have anxiously awaited the Bill, having read of its progress in the other place, but those working in child care have been anxiously awaiting such a major Bill for at least 10 years. In 1968 we were promised another Bill in the not too distant future because it was recognised then that the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 had not dealt with everything that it might. I remember that fairly vividly because at that time I was training as a child care officer and we were arguing strongly for the introduction of family courts.

I have been struck today by the number of hon. Members who have supported the case for a family court. That support has been almost unanimous across the Floor of the House. I hope that Ministers have heard that. It is now 20 years since legislation was promised in 1968 and I hope that the House will not tolerate such a delay again.

We are looking to the Government to move much more quickly—I hope during the passage of the Bill—towards a family court structure. Many of the good things in the Bill cannot be achieved under the current structure. The Bill moves towards recognising the rights of children and their right to be represented properly in court. The adversarial system simply cannot deal with that effectively. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will look at that.

Many hon. Members have welcomed the Bill but have recognised that in some areas it is profoundly disappointing. They have dealt with those points that are missing from the Bill and those aspects of it that do not assure us of the general or the specific protection that our children need.

The subject with which I am most concerned is that of day care. The Government have a problem because they have adopted targeting in every other policy, but tonight the House is asking them to recognise that targeting will inevitably miss some children who will have to live with the effect of that for the rest of their lives.

Hon. Members have talked about training. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) put forcibly the case for a proper initial training for all workers in this area. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) made a good and thoughtful speech. He paid tribute to the work of those in the voluntary organisations and the local authorities. Far too often, they are the people who bear the brunt of our anger and frustration when systems laid down by the House fail.

I was trained in the late 1960s and I practised in the early 1970s, and in those days it was almost unthinkable to remove children from their home. We were trained and encouraged to do whatever we could to keep children in their home. That was the mood of the time. However, as the tragedies happened, so the public's mood, frequently reflected in the House, was that social workers should have removed children at risk much earlier. That is the climate within which the Cleveland crisis arose. We should remember what happened before Cleveland and, in particular, recognise that social workers were asking for legislation long before that crisis arose. Therefore, no hon. Member can absolve himself or herself from responsibility for what happened.

We cannot look at the Bill in isolation. The past 10 years have been a bleak experience for many of the nation's children, many of them faring worse than the children of some of our European neighbours. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has produced figures which demonstrate that Britain's poorest 4 million households have seen their living standards fall by an average of 6 per cent.—more than £2 a week—under the Government. Britain's poor are now poorer than they were in 1979, and Britain has more of Europe's poor now living within its boundaries. Britain used to have the second lowest rate of population in poverty in Europe, but now we are sixth. In 1979, 480,000 families depended on supplementary benefit, but by 1986 that figure had increased to 1·140 million. Many, many children are involved in that number, and it is they whom we are concerned about tonight.

In drawing together some research from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, from Strathclyde and from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, a study by Becker and MacPherson in 1986 concluded that, whilst the causal link association between poverty and abuse or neglect required further detailed research, there was both quantitative and qualitative evidence to suggest that there was a link.

I take very seriously the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) that many children who are not in this category of a poor family nonetheless suffer neglect and abuse. Nonetheless we are putting at risk many of our children simply by condemning them to life in a poor family. A 1984 Select Committee said that children who came into care were the children of the poor. That reflects what my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles was saying—that those are the children who end up in care; they are the children identified.

I am not trying to say that poor people abuse and neglect their children. However, we need to understand the social processes by which children end up as victims. Poverty and all it means in our society does have an effect and for this House to neglect that fact is to neglect the needs and aspirations of many people in our society.

Many hon. Members and organisations active in child care have great concern about the situation of young people leaving care, and that matter has been addressed by hon. Members today. Some of the stories that I have heard, as a member of the general committee of the National Children's Home and from other organisations, paint a very depressing picture. I have heard of young people left with as little as 12p a day after paying accommodation costs. Young people are being made homeless or forced into prostitution and other illegal activities in order to survive.

The broad brush approach of the Government is simply not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, and the recent social security changes are affecting these children particularly.

Mr. Devlin: This is not a partisan Bill.

Ms. Armstrong: I am dealing with what the Bill does not cover and with aspects of the Bill that are linked to other pieces of legislation. Conservative Members may not like the fact that other pieces of their legislation are making children victims. I am saying that this House has the responsibility to ensure that this does not happen.

In the Committee in another place, my noble Friend Baroness David moved an amendment calling for an estranged young person's premium under the social security system. In rejecting the amendment, the Lord Chancellor said that this was the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Social Security. However, in the view of many of us and many groups working with these most vulnerable young people, the Secretary of State for Social Security is not fulfilling his responsibility to them.

The noble Baroness Faithfull moved an amendment after the Secretary of State for Social Security had announced that some concessions would be made to a small group of 16 to 17-year-olds. On Third Reading, the noble Baroness said:

"Although we are grateful to the Minister for the extra help to 16 and 17 year olds under the Social Security system, we feel that it is quite inadequate."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 16 March 1989; Vol. 505, c.380.]

Such matters will have to be addressed in Committee because we know that these young people, through no fault of their own, have become victims. That is part of our concern in considering this Bill. If deals partially with children who have become victims, who have little control over actions taken against them, and few defences to counter neglect.

We all recognise our responsibility for developing more effective means of identifying neglect and abuse and for intervening to stop it. However, we must also work towards providing support for all children, so that fewer of them become victims. Anyone who works with damaged children knows that that damage lives with them and will affect them throughout their lives. Without appropriate support, it can also affect their own behaviour as parents.

We argue that society has a responsibility to offer all children opportunity, and that opportunity is an effective way of ensuring that as few children as possible become children in danger. Services for families with young children should provide a powerful means of support for all children and not just for the most vulnerable. The Government are afraid that if they ensure the provision of services for all children, somehow that will undermine the family. In the first decade of this century, there was considerable argument about that matter, but significant advances were made in legislation affecting children. Universal health screening at school and school dinners were instituted. Members of Parliament at that time felt that that would in some way undermine the family, and that if the state stepped in and took responsibility for examining the child's health or for feeding him, millions of mothers and fathers would feel no sense of responsibility for their children. Those politicians were proved wrong.

In Committee, we shall seek to ensure that local authorities have a duty to provide day care themselves or in partnership with the voluntary and private sectors. We shall assert a statutory duty to offer nursery education to all children. Children enjoy attending pre-school centres and benefit from doing so. The effects are long-lasting, and their parents benefit from short-term relief from the full-time job of caring for their children. They also benefit from the ability to work if they wish, and from the increased confidence that is a consequence of involvement in nursery and pre-school centres.

Limiting local authority day care to children in need is shortsighted. It stigmatises the children and their families at an early stage. Targeting in that area, as in others, does not work.

The Government's response to date is woefully inadequate. The statement from the ministerial group last week gives no hope for the future. The people of this country are looking for a national, co-ordinated child care policy that will ensure that many fewer children become vulnerable. We shall argue for extending child rights to all children and not just to those facing emergencies in the knowledge that such support strengthens parents in caring for their children and demonstrates a responsible Government attitude for the future.

We want to open up opportunities for all children, because we want as few of them as possible to end up victims. The Government must not think that women who go out to work pose a threat to the family unit. That is one way which the family survives, and it can also be a way in which the family grows in a completely new and different direction. Family life has changed. It has moved on and become very different. We must ensure that those changes are recognised and that we work with families as they are.

I hope that we have flagged up some of the issues. I particularly want the Minister to address the question of quality of care. The Government have been promising since last November amendments to the Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act 1948, and they have been mentioned by right hon. and hon. Members tonight. We are concerned that out of school schemes should be recognised and continue to be registered. If they are deregistered, as rumour suggests, older children—many still young and vulnerable—would be left without statutory protection, in terms of both standards of care and the personnel providing that care. Hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles and the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), have outlined the potential problems, and I urge the Government not to go down that road. I ask the Solicitor-General to tell us tonight when the amendments will appear, so that we can ensure that we have plenty of time to consider them.

I have tried to cover some issues that are in the Bill and some that are not. The Minister told us at the beginning of the debate that this would be our last opportunity for many years to put matters right. We welcome much of what is in the Bill, but we urge the Solicitor-General to recognise in his reply the importance of matters which are not in the Bill but which are central to ensuring that we offer opportunity, support and security to the children of the future—and to the children of today, so that the country will have a future.

9.40 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): This has been, on the whole, an exceptionally thoughtful and constructive debate. There can hardly be a subject more important to any of us in the House, or in the country as a whole, than the subject of children—particularly those afflicted by family breakdown or by any one of the various circumstances of difficulty, distress or danger for which the Bill seeks to provide a new framework of law and thereby, we hope, the route to a remedy and a better life.

The Bill has two main aims. The first is to gather in one place and, we hope, in one coherent whole all the law relating to the care and upbringing of children and the provision of social services to meet their needs. The second is to provide a consistent set of legal remedies which will be available in all courts and all proceedings. Those seemingly simple aims are more revolutionary than most people realise: they have never been achieved before. Child law, perhaps more than any other aspect of family law, has developed piecemeal to provide particular remedies at particular times for what appear at the time to be particular needs.

The Bill represents the first attempt to establish a unified and consistent code of law covering the care and upbringing of children in both the private and the public domains. It is the result of a number of studies, starting with the report "Children in Care" produced by the Select Committee on Social Services during the 1983-84 Session and including the Law Commission's valuable report on guardianship and custody, published last year. Let me pay a special tribute to the Law Commission's invaluable work in this regard.

"Children in Care" gave rise to the interdepartmental review and consultation report entitled "Review of Child Care Law" in 1985, and that in turn led to the White Paper "The Law on Child Care and Family Services" early in 1987. There then followed, as we all know, the tragic events in Cleveland which led to the setting up of the statutory inquiry under Lord Justice Butler-Sloss. The delay has meant that it has been possible to incorporate in the Bill the lessons learned from that valuable report.

The debate has rightly welcomed the three basic principles that run through the Bill. The first is the improved statement of the welfare principle governing court decisions in respect of children—namely, that the child's welfare must always be the paramount consideration—and the fact that all courts in reaching all decisions about the care and upbringing of the child must do what is best for that child. Secondly, there is the major reform of the law governing parental responsibility, guardianship, and the court's power to make orders in respect of the children in family proceedings, which rightly lays so much emphasis on the primary function of parenthood and the right and obligation of parents to care for their children and to bring them up properly. Thirdly, there is the re-statement of the powers and duties of local authorities to provide services to children and their families in a way which emphasises partnership with parents and pays regard to the needs of children.

This finds expression in the concept which runs like a golden thread through the Bill, that while intervention where necessary is provided for, the courts and public authorities should seek to intervene in the normal arrangements of family life only where it is necessary in the interests of the child to do so and that, when they do, they should ensure that it is done in an appropriate and sensitive way.

Against that background, there was such a large number of constructive and thoughtful contributions that I shall be unable to deal with them all. However, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) began to draw the threads together when he referred to safe houses for runaway children, family courts and grandparents—a point that was so fully and eloquently developed by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and that was picked up by many of my hon. Friends. The hon. Member for Monklands, West also referred to a new clause on child protection and to the important question of the implementation of the Bill.

The objective is not to allow the problem to drag on year after year, as has happened under all Governments during the last few decades. We shall seek to implement the Bill within about 18 months. However, there are complex details to be worked out if this all-important subject is to be fully dealt with in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) asked about runaway children. I repeat what my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State said earlier: that we shall seek to meet the concerns of the Church of England Children's Society and to achieve the right balance. That will include my hon. Friend's concerns. We shall also seek to exempt the appropriate organisations, thereby taking into account the anxieties of the Children's Society.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston referred to the meaning of "children in need" and drew a distinction between the duty to provide for children in need and the power to provide for other children in a local authority's area. She need have no worries about that. There will be a continuation of the existing power.

I intend to deal in detail with the point about grandparents that was taken up by the hon. Member for Ogmore and also by my hon. Friends the Members for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) and for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Sir D. Walters) who explained that he could not stay until the end of the debate.

The Bill will provide grandparents with significant new rights. If the child has lived with them for three years they will have an automatic right to be party to any proceedings. What is more important, if those with parental responsibility agree, grandparents can automatically be brought into the proceedings. Furthermore, with the leave of the court, they may also be brought into the proceedings. The Bill provides that their rights may be extended even further, if that is thought to be necessary.

We have approached constructively the rights of grandparents. We want local authorities to consider the placement of children with the wider family, including grandparents, when parents cannot adequately look after their children, subject to such a placement being in the best interests of the child. In addition, the Bill provides that grandparents can apply for a contact order. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) for referring to the direct language of the Bill. It is saddening and disgraceful if grandparents have to resort to the subterfuges described by the hon. Member for Ogmore. They will be able to apply to the court for a contact order, if that would help the child in question. All those provisions represent a marked step forward in assisting grandparents in the way that hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish.

Mr. Holt: My hon. and learned Friend has just said that grandparents may apply to the courts. Will such provisions be liberally interpreted by the courts when they make such applications?

The Solicitor-General: Of course that is a matter for the court and court practice at the time, but we are

[The Solicitor-General]

encouraging local authorities to view that approach constructively as the proper way to treat a child in those circumstances.

The question of family courts has been raised by many hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth and passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin). I studied the subject carefully some years ago. While there is a huge weight of opinion behind the concept of the family court, there are almost as many opinions as to the meaning of that concept. The Bill contains some constructive steps towards a sensible family court and I shall quickly enumerate some of them.

First, as my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has constantly and rightly emphasised, if we are to have a sensible family court, first we must get substantive family law right and that is the primary objective of the Bill. As for the concept of a unified family court, we are not going the whole way, but the Bill consolidates all proceedings relating to the child and his family. All the remedies under the Bill are to be available in all family proceedings. That is a great step forward for anyone who has practised in this field. The Bill provides for each case to find its way to the right court—that has been a problem—on the application of a party, or if the court decides that the case needs to go to a higher court or sometimes to a lower court it can make that transfer. All parties, or those who believe that they should be parties, have a right to apply to be joined in those proceedings. As nobody wants a multiplicity of proceedings, that right is likely to fall on receptive ears.

The Bill is a beginning of a rolling programme of reform which will link the reform of the substantive law with procedural and jurisdictional reform. It is a major move in the direction which those advocating a family court have been urging which we can examine in further detail in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston and the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) raised questions about protecting children in local authority care. The Secretary of State will be able to make regulations governing the placing of children with local authority foster parents. My hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston was particularly concerned about that. Everyone is anxious that that immensely valuable service, provided with such dedication by so many people, should not be tainted by placing children with those who are unsuitable.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East raised a number of very thoughtful points. He asked a rather technical question about the difference between the welfare duty of the courts in clause 1 and local authorities' duties in clause 18. But it is clear that the duty of the court is to the particular child before the court. Therefore, of course, one considers the best interests of that child. But the duty of local authorities in clause 18 is wider and more general and applies to all children in that category so the duty is sensibly and inevitably framed rather differently.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), who was putting not only his own concerns as a constituency Member of Parliament, but those of the Police Federation, which he now represents—and I congratulate him—spoke of some of the anxieties of the police about the enforcement of powers and the sanctions against a parent who might refuse to produce a child or to allow access. A person who refused to do either of those would be ordered to come before the court, if it were one of the higher courts, and if he refused to obey he would be subject to all the penalties available for contempt. In the magistrates court, failure to comply would lead to a fine or imprisonment under section 62 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980.

A number of hon. Members raised questions about wardship, including the hon. Member for Leicester, East. Wardship is no longer to be available as an alternative to care proceedings and that must be sensible. In my recollection, it was in some ways disruptive, but it may be of comfort to the hon. Gentleman, who is shaking his head, if I remind him that the more complex care cases will be transferred to the county court or the High Court and there is always an inherent jurisdiction in the High Court, which will remain available for serious cases in which there seems to be no statutory or satisfactory remedy. That provides a safety net and it is better that wardship should be used thus than in the rather wide way in which it tended to be used in the past. Again, we can discuss that point further in Committee.

Many hon. Members expressed interest in the child assessment order. It is a most complex and important matter and was dealt with earlier by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State. The connections of my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children are long-standing. To him and to the hon. Member for Greenwich, (Mrs. Barnes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), I must say that we look forward to discussing those matters more fully in Committee.

The hon. Member for Eccles took up the point made by a number of hon. Members about the suggested abolition of parental contribution. That sounds friendly and attractive when initially suggested and one wonders why parents should contribute, but the suggestion is for the abolition of a long-standing practice. The Bill follows the recommendation in the review of child care law consultation document that the current two schemes should be brought into line. It goes on to emphasise the aspect of reasonableness when it comes to considering which families are capable of paying and properly should pay and which should not.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Solicitor-General give way?

The Solicitor-General: No, because I have only three minutes left, so please forgive me.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) talked about excluding the alleged abuser, which is an important matter. In practice, it will be open to a person who obtains an emergency protection order to leave the child at home if the alleged abuser agrees to leave. We are considering whether a special exclusion order in addition to the emergency protection order may, in some instances, be helpful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East and the hon. Member for Greenwich were concerned with the possibility of introducing amendments in Committee to modernise the provisions of the Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act 1948 relating to day

care for the under-fives. We have it in mind to make the registration duty placed on the social services departments of local authorities simpler to operate and easier to enforce, in line with the proposals of the 1987 White Paper. However, we are considering, in response to suggestions made in the other place, whether the registration duty should apply to day care facilities for children up to the age of eight. Those provisions will be disapplied in relation to facilities for older children, but we intend to provide for the regulation of residential holiday activities, again in line with the White Paper. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East that the voluntary sector has an important part to play in all this work in co-operation with the statutory sector.

In conclusion, in whatever way the many matters on which hon. Members of all parties have commented are ultimately formulated, the Bill as a whole represents the most comprehensive and far-reaching reform of child law. It links for the first time the strands of private law on the upbringing of children and the public law on local authority services, compulsory intervention and private arrangements for caring for children to produce a single code of consistent principles of practice which will pave the way for further reform of family law and procedure. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Resolution may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

CHILDREN BILL *[Lords] [Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Ordered,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Children Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required for the payment by the Secretary of State of grants under the Act;

(b) any other expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act;

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

CHILDREN BILL *[Lords] [Ways and Means]*

Ordered,

That in the Children Bill *[Lords]* it is expedient to include provision—

(a) with respect to the financial provisions applicable on the cessation of controlled or assisted community homes or on the disposal of premises used for the purposes of such homes;

(b) authorising the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received by the Secretary of State under the Bill.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Attendance Allowance

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

10 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for choosing this subject as the Adjournment debate for this evening. In speaking on the Adjournment of the House, I wish to draw attention to the plight of one of my constituents, Mrs. Moran, in claiming the attendance allowance. In so doing, I wish to refer to three heroes. The first is obviously Mrs. Moran herself who, over the past six years, has attempted to gain the full rate of attendance allowance. The second is Mr. Moran, who has given such an extraordinary degree of love and attention to his wife. The third is Nick Warren. I am unique in having a legal unit in my constituency which helps me with my constituents' legal grievances. That in itself would be worth bringing to the attention of the House, but the fact that that unit is staffed by the most talented welfare rights lawyer makes it doubly so and, I am sure, a pleasurable pain in the flesh of the Government.

I begin by recalling some facts about Mrs. Moran. First, however, I must say how pleased I am to see my neighbour, the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), in the Chamber. My constituent, Mrs. Moran, has suffered from epilepsy since she was 17. She now also suffers from Parkinson's disease and part of her life is spent in hospital. She is also in danger from wounds and bears on her face severe burns. However, she is lucky in having the support of her family and especially of Mr. Moran. It is not going too far to say that Mr. Moran's care and attention has ensured that Mrs. Moran is alive today. Despite all those facts, however, Mrs. Moran has been refused the higher rate of attendance allowance, although there is no lack of medical evidence to support her claim.

Tonight I share one of the Minister's advantages, in that I have a prepared brief from Nick Warren to which I shall pay careful attention in presenting the details of the case to the Minister and to the House. In 1983 the attendance allowance board sent a Dr. Husain to interview Mrs. Moran. He reported back that she could not safely be left at night because she might have a fit and choke. About a year later the board sent another doctor, Dr. Mann, who agreed with the first doctor sent by the attendance allowance board.

Dr. Raymond, the family's general practitioner, has reported to the attendance allowance board in the following terms:

> "This lady has the most severe and least well controlled epilepsy of any patient on my list, and I am quite sure that she requires the full time care and supervision provided by her husband."

Dr. Chadwick, a consultant neurologist at Walton hospital in Liverpool, has also examined Mrs. Moran and has expressed the following opinion:

> "It would seem irresponsible to underestimate the anxiety generated by her problem for a caring family. Their desire to be able to provide round the clock supervision is entirely understandable and, in my view in this particular instance, entirely reasonable."

The doctor who took the decision for the attendance allowance board also accepted that a risk of substantial danger attended any and every fit which was accompanied

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by a loss of consciousness and that during her fits, of which she had no warning, Mrs. Moran needed supervision to avoid danger.

What does the law say on this point? Why did that doctor not award the higher rate of attendance allowance? Following general attendance allowance board guidance, he refused the higher rate because he did not accept that a person who was merely on standby, ready to take action when a fit came on, could be described as giving supervision. Mrs. Moran challenged that interpretation of the law and was successful in the Court of Appeal in March 1987. The court sent the case back to the attendance allowance board for a fresh decision according to law. Regrettably, the Government chose to reverse the court's decision so far as it concerned night-time supervision by section 1 of the Social Security Act 1988. Fortunately, however, the old law still applies to Mrs. Moran's claim and to all other claims and reviews prior to the Royal Assent. The Minister who is here now and who answered that debate made it very clear in the House and in Committee that that was so, and I am grateful to him for that.

One might have hoped that that would have been the end of the story when the case was sent back from the Court of Appeal and that the board would have seen the error of its ways and awarded Mrs. Moran the full attendance allowance, but it did not do so. Looking at the case again, it altered its doctor's previous finding that there was a risk attached to an epileptic fit and decided that the risk of any harm coming to a person from an epileptic fit at night was so remote as not to be worthy of attention. That was, to put it mildly, an odd conclusion. Most hon. Members will have had the experience, unhappily, of constituents with a relative who died in a fit. The decision ran contrary to medical evidence which I mentioned earlier, and it ran contrary to the view that the board had expressed previously in relation to all claims involving people with epilepsy. It also contradicted the evidence of Mr. Richard Pugh, the director of social work for the British Epilepsy Association, who told the board in a statement that a rough search through his files for the past two years had produced 12 examples of people found dead in bed as a result of epileptic fits.

Mrs. Moran has appealed against the decision of the attendance allowance board. There is no appeal from the board's decision on questions of fact—a point to which I shall come in a moment. Only if there is an error of law can the social security commissioners intervene. Fortunately for Mrs. Moran—and, I believe, fortunately for justice—the decision was littered with errors of law. A tribunal of commissioners last month set aside the board's decision due to various breaches of the rules of natural justice and errors of law in the board's approach to the question of what risks should be disregarded—a point that lawyers describe as remoteness.

There are now some important questions for the Minister which relate not just to Mrs. Moran's case, important though that is, but to the general performance of the attendance allowance board.

First, I want to put to the Minister the claim of Mrs. Moran herself. This has now been referred back to the same attendance allowance board which wrongly refused her twice. This time it intends to hold an oral hearing of the case, and the Secretary of State will be represented at that hearing. The finest words that the Minister could say today are that the Secretary of State's representative at that hearing will invite the board to award Mrs. Moran the 24-hour attendance allowance for life—I accept that the Government's representative cannot himself award the allowance, but he can support Mrs. Moran's claim. Will the Government do that?

Secondly, this case highlights the difficulties that claimants face when there is no appeal on questions of fact against the attendance allowance board's decision. At the hearing before the social security commissioners it was said that the board considered that there was no risk of death from an epileptic fit at night. The only evidence produced to support that extraordinary assertion was a study in 1979 of eight people with epilepsy in one district of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. No evidence from this country was presented at that hearing, and only two of the eight were recorded as having died in bed. It is shocking that a general policy should be overturned on such slender evidence. The board might not have been in such a hurry to reach that conclusion had it known that there was an independent right of appeal on questions of fact and that its findings would have to be justified by the evidence.

The Minister should introduce a right of appeal on attendance allowance decisions to the social security appeal tribunal, which consists of a lawyer and two ordinary members of the public who are well used to weighing medical evidence. Perhaps equally important, they are used to having oral hearings at which a patient or carer can explain the case in ordinary language. The attendance allowance system of adjudication is practically unique within the DSS in hardly ever offering the citizen a chance to explain his or her case in person. The appeal would do precisely that.

The third question is perhaps more immediate: what about the other cases involving people with epilepsy which have presumably been decided by the board or its delegates in the same erroneous way? I am pleased to say that several cases were held back by the Government pending the first Moran decision. Will the Minister check the files and invite and support late applications for appeal by claimants who have or may have been wrongly refused the allowance?

Fourthly, the problem is wider still because the decision of the tribunal of commissioners has cast doubt on the guidance that the attendance allowance board has given to doctors who take decisions concerning the legal question of remoteness. In paragraph 5.12.4 of the guidance, the board has told doctors that they can disregard hazards which are unlikely to occur. That is unlawful, because it takes no account of small risks with disastrous consequences. An event might be unlikely in the sense that it has, say, only a 5 per cent. chance of happening, but if that 5 per cent. chance involves someone else's or one's own death it would be sensible and reasonable to take precautions against it. It appears, therefore, that many other cases have been wrongly decided on the issue of remoteness since the board issued its guidance last June. It follows that the benefit has not been hitting its target—a particular aim of the Government's social policy. What does the Minister intend to do in such cases?

I hope that the Minister will be able to give assurances that Mrs. Moran will win her private fight for justice. I hope that he will also give an assurance that the files will

be searched to ensure that justice is done in other cases. I hope that the Minister will give the further assurance that there will be change in future.

I end my speech with one last question. It is not my question but that of Mr. Moran who is closely following the debate. I asked him what one message he wished me to give the Minister before the Minister replied to the debate on the long battle that Mr. Moran's wife had been fighting for the attendance allowance. Mr. Moran's question can be put quite simply. He recalled, as I have recalled, all the events—including going to the Court of Appeal where he and Mrs. Moran went in their fight for justice—and his question was, "Where else do we have to go for justice?" I hope that the Minister will answer that question and start giving justice to Mrs. Moran.

10.13 pm

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Does the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) have the agreement of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and the Minister to speak?

Mr. Frank Field: Yes.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Yes.

Mr. Porter: I share two things with the hon. Member of Birkenhead (Mr. Field). First, we both live in Birkenhead. He has the privilege of being my Member of Parliament. He has made a powerful case in respect of Mrs. Moran. I do not wish to repeat what he has already advanced. His case does not seem to create a precedent which would involve enormous public expenditure. It would involve justice, which the Government should accept. It would not involve the Government in any great difficulty.

Secondly, I have the privilege of sharing with my Member of Parliament a trusteeship arranged by Mr. Nicholas Warren who deals, in Birkenhead and in appropriate places, with all sorts of difficulties that people have with the Department of Social Security. The trusteeship has been an enormous success. I pay tribute to my Member of Parliament and to Mr. Warren, a solicitor who does not need a large amount of money to do anything.

It is important that justice is seen to be done and that the Government show compassion. That can be done without great expense to the public purse. Surely, on the arguments advanced by my Member of Parliament, the difficulty can, should and, I trust, will be overcome.

10.15 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for raising this case. It has been in the frame, as it were, ever since I assumed my present responsibilities. I have talked to a number of holders of my office and to those who were Parliamentary Secretaries in the Department. They recall the long-running issue involved in Mrs. Moran's claim for a higher rate of attendance allowance. I acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) has weighed in behind the hon. Gentleman.

Like the hon. Member for Birkenhead, I cannot but pay tribute to Mrs Moran and to Mr. Moran, who, as he said, is following the debate with great interest, for the way that they have sustained their case. I also pay tribute to Nick Warren, despite the difficulties that he may from time to time have caused for those in the Department with responsibility for these matters. He has a high reputation in this area.

The first thing I have to say will be disappointing, but I cannot think that it will be any surprise to the House to know that, whatever sympathy I have for Mrs. Moran —the hon. Member for Birkenhead knows of my sympathy—I cannot make any decision on her claim. We have a system of attendance allowance claims, in common with claims for all other social security benefits, based on independent adjudicating authorities. The allowance is awarded, or disallowed, by an adjudication officer who is wholly independent of Ministers and civil servants in the Department.

Claimants who are dissatisfied with the decisions of adjudication officers can appeal to a social security appeal tribunal and thence, with leave, to the social security commissioner on a point of law. It is important for the House to realise that the adjudication officer and the SSAT can award an allowance only for the period and at the rate specified on a certificate of attendance needs issued by the attendance allowance board or by a medical practitioner who has been delegated to act on behalf of the board. We have to accept that those basic rules cannot be altered by a Minister, however sympathetic he may be towards an individual case.

Review decisions of the board or its delegates are themselves subject to the same rights of review as initial decisions. Review decisions can also be challenged by way of an appeal on a question of law to the social security commissioner. We cannot decide claims, nor can we alter or try to affect decisions given by the board or its delegates about whether the medical criteria for the attendance are satisfied in individual cases.

The hon. Gentleman raised the record of the board. I believe that the record of achievement of the attendance allowance scheme over the years has vindicated Parliament's decision to entrust those decisions to the board and to the various appeal procedures that are available to claimants.

The board has the duty of applying the criteria in individual cases and to use its expertise and judgment. It is made up of eminent clinicians, expert in various fields of medicine, as well as lay people with interests and insight into the needs of disabled people. Its delegates are usually practising or retired general practitioners who, of course, have practical experience of the effects of disability in all its forms on the daily lives of disabled people.

I shall set Mrs. Moran's case in the wider context. The decisions of the board have been instrumental in the award of attendance allowance to more than 2 million people, and some 65 per cent. of all initial claims made since 1971 have been favourable. Today, about 760,000 people are in receipt of attendance allowance. I am certainly not claiming at this Dispatch Box that the board always gets it right first time, or that the needs of individual disabled people do not change over time. That is why the arrangements for the review of the decisions on the medical criteria in individual cases must take account of both those eventualities.

On the face of it, one could say that the number of occasions when changes have been made to that initial decision—approaching 20,000 cases over the years—looks

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a lot, but it represents only 6·4 per cent. of the number of decisions on new attendance allowance claims in 1987. For the board and its delegates to have given decisions on initial claims which satisfy over 90 per cent. of claimants is a remarkable achievement. It is all the more remarkable when one bears in mind that claimants are encouraged to seek review if they are dissatisfied when details of the decisions of the board and its delegates are sent to them.

There is rightly every incentive for dissatisfied claimants to exercise that right and to seek review. Attendance allowance is well worth receiving in its own right. It is a well targeted benefit. It provides welcome help with the extra costs arising from long-term disability, but it also provides a passport to the income support disability premium and severe disability premium and a passport through the disablement test for severe disablement allowance; and, of course, it is a precondition for payment of invalid care allowance. It is therefore an important passport. There is every incentive for those who may be turned down to seek a review. I do not complain about that at all, because I am anxious to ensure that all those who are entitled, either to the lower or to the higher rate, get that entitlement.

The relevant change of circumstances reviews are an important part of the process. Reviews on that ground relate exclusively to people who have been awarded the lower rate allowance and whose attendance needs have changed, which is relevant to Mrs. Moran's circumstances. In 1987, relevant change of circumstances reviews resulted in some 24,000 decisons being changed. There is therefore no automatic tendency on review to turn down cases which are raised and for which reviews are asked. We all know that the needs of disabled people are not fixed. Their circumstances genuinely change from year to year, and, indeed, over even shorter time scales. It is right that there should be a system that makes it possible to review the changes and to see whether the higher rate allowance may be appropriate because of the changed circumstances.

One of the most important points raised by the hon. Gentleman was that the board had somehow changed its position on the risks attached to epileptic fits, which especially applies to Mrs. Moran's case. Perhaps, in response, I could quote what I believe to be an especially relevant passage from the recent decision of the tribunal of commissoners explaining why that was a reasonable thing for the board to do:

"Now had the factual situation as found by the Board remained as it was at the time of the Commissioner's decision of 30 April 1986 then, in the light of the guidance of the Court of Appeal's judgment, the claimant might reasonably have expected her claim to succeed.

In those circumstances it would be entirely understandable for the claimant to feel that the Board have to use a colloquialism 'moved the goalposts'. But of course that would be an entirely wrong way to look at it. It is the function of the Board to use their accumulated medical knowledge and expertise objectively to assess each case before them, and it is their right and, indeed their duty, to take account of any advances and other changes in such knowledge so that the opinions they express reflect the most up-to-date established thinking."

However, the relevant paragraph goes on to explain the commissioner's view that this principle should be subject to an obligation on the board to explain why it revised or modified a long-established approach. In that connection, I shall pick up the question put by the hon. Member for Birkenhead about the American evidence which was quoted by the board in support of its contention about the risk of death in bed from epilepsy.

The board may wish to respond to the commissioner's view about the need for explanation when it comes to review Mrs. Moran's case once again. I understand that doctors often have to interpret published scientific evidence, which may not be conclusive in the light of their own clinical experience, when deciding on the management of their patients. In those circumstances, references may be quoted more by way of illustration than as conclusive proof. In that respect, the board is no exception in reaching a view on the risks attached to epileptic fits in bed at night.

That leads me to give the only answer I can give to the two other questions posed by the hon. Gentleman. It is because we have appointed the board as a source of expert advice, based on accumulated experience and the ability to interpret medical experience, that, despite the hon. Gentleman's understandable plea for the Secretary of State to be involved in the next hearing, it would be inappropriate for my right hon. Friend to express to the board the simple and unequivocal support for Mrs. Moran's claim as proposed by the hon. Gentleman.

I do not believe there would be any point in securing the service of expert advisers and adjudicators if one then told them what to do in their sphere of expert judgment. For similar reasons, I doubt that it would necessarily serve the claimants' interests to seek to put one set of experts on top of another. There is already provision for appeal to the commissioners on matters of law and I do not believe it would necessarily improve matters to impose a higher tier of medical adjudication.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the commissioner's comments on the board's guidance to its delegated doctors and about earlier cases decided under these guidelines. The board will undoubtedly be reconsidering those guidelines in view of what the tribunal of commissioners said in its recent decision. In the event that the board revises those guidelines, it will obviously be necessary for consideration to be given to the implications for the previous cases to which the hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention.

I recognise that Mrs. Moran's case has been at issue for a long time. I hope that the hon. Member for Birkenhead and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South will recognise that that is the result of fundamental questions that have been raised in the course of that case. Whatever sympathy I have for the particular circumstances of Mr. and Mrs. Moran—I assure the hon. Gentleman of my sympathy—it was inevitable that that case would be protracted because of its importance to the claimant and to the Department. Therefore, some delay and an extension of the consideration of the case was inevitable. The Department and the independent adjudicating authority have all been involved in that.

Let us consider the circumstances in which it will be for the attendance allowance board again to reconsider Mrs. Moran's case in the light of the guidance on relevant legal issues that has been handed down by the Appeal Court and the social security commissioners. I understand that, at present, the board is discussing with Mrs. Moran's representatives a suitable date when it might be able to hear her case. I am confident that everyone present in the Chamber hopes that that hearing, combined with guidance from the courts and the commissioners and the board's expertise on the medical issues involved, and the

subsequent decision—I cannot prejudge what it will be —will be instrumental in bringing Mrs. Moran's case to a satisfactory conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 28 April 1989

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Football Supporters (Identity Cards)

9.34 am

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I beg leave to present a petition from supporters of Millwall football club and members of the Football Supporters Association which has been end rsed by 10,000 signatures, including mine. The substance of the petition is that

the proposed legislation to force football supporters to carry identification cards . . . will have little impact on the problem of football-related violence, will hinder football's attempts to attract a new generation of supporters and will lead to the eventual demise of the game as a spectator sport.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Government to bring forward proposals which have the support of genuine football supporters.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etcetera.

To lie upon the Table.

Sunday Trading

9.35 am

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I beg leave to present a petition from Councillor Mrs. Jill Reeves and other residents in my constituency of Castle Point who are

concerned that any future legislation on Sunday trading and commercial activity should uphold the character of Sunday as a shared and special day for the enjoyment of family life, rest, community and worship.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do safeguard the uniqueness of the whole of Sunday, both through the requirements of the law, and through the enforcement of the same.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Hearing Aid Council (Amendment) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

DUTIES OF THE COUNCIL AND SECRETARY OF STATE

'(1) Section 1(4) of the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968 (in this Act referred to as "the principal Act") shall be omitted and the following shall be substituted:

"The Secretary of State may require the Council to submit for his written approval any standard or code drawn up under this section or any variation of any such standard or code which he may have previously approved provided that he shall first consult the Council and consider any representations made".

(2) In section 1(5) of that Act for the words "Board of Trade" there shall be substituted "Secretary of State".

(3) In section 1(6) of that Act for the words "may investigate" there shall be substituted "shall investigate".'.—*[Mr. Hunter.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.36 am

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause stands in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). At the start, may I say how much I support the Bill. It is a much-needed measure. Like many other hon. Members, I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on selecting this theme. When I cast my mind back over the nearly six years in which it has been my privilege to be a Member, I doubt whether three or four months have passed without a constituent getting in touch with me about the hearing aid industry or about the activities—or lack of them—of the Hearing Aid Council. It is generally agreed that the time is long overdue to turn our attention to the Hearing Aid Council. I support the Bill fully and the amendments to it have one purpose only—to make a good Bill even better.

In preparing for the debate, my attention was brought, courtesy of the House of Commons Library, to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and its current paper "Hearing Aids: the Case for Change", which was published in October 1988. One need quote only one paragraph to illustrate the need for the Bill and the new clause. It gives this startling information:

"the Disciplinary Committee of the Council has met just 11 times since 1968 and not at all since 1985 . . . just 7 dispensers have been struck off the Register, the last in 1976."

I dare say that matters have changed since October, but that is a startling admission of the council's ineffectiveness and inadequacies.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): For the sake of accuracy, will my hon. Friend confirm that the Hearing Aid Council can institute disciplinary proceedings only if it receives complaints? No doubt my hon. Friend will let the House know how any complaints were received during the period that he mentioned; according to my information it was relatively few.

Mr. Hunter: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right that relatively few complaints have been received, and that underlines the weakness of the whole system: the Hearing

[Mr. Hunter]

Aid Council's code of practice does not afford the protection that consumers—and sometimes the industry—need.

I was agreeably surprised to discover that the new clause had been selected for debate. It approximates very closely to the new clause 1 that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn moved on 5 April in Committee and I shall deploy substantially the same arguments as he did. It is unusual for us to have a second opportunity—by means of a second new clause—to debate a matter that is undoubtedly of great importance, but more can, and should, be said in support of the general theme that the Secretary of State should be given more powers.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): May I reply to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter)? I understand that the disciplinary committee of the Hearing Aid Council has met just five times since 1976 and struck off one dispenser in 12 years. In the 21 years of its existence, it has met only 12 times and struck off only seven dispensers. That contrasts sharply with the 300 complaints received by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) since the introduction of the Bill was announced. There is therefore a case for saying that there is a background of complaints that have not been adequately dealt with by the present machinery of the council.

Mr. Hunter: My hon. Friend puts more clearly the point that I tried to make in response to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter)—that the system has not been working. That problem is being addressed in the Bill.

As arguments in favour of the new clause are essentially the same as those advanced in an earlier debate, it is important and beneficial to consider what was said in Committee by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn and by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs. In speaking to his new clause, the hon. Member for Ynys Môn started with a significant point. Displaying his natural courtesy, he thanked the Minister and his officials for the assistance that he had received in preparing the Bill and, no doubt, arguments in favour of some of the clauses. It seems to me that, in so doing, the hon. Gentleman laid himself open to the charge that I level against him now without any malice, that he did not press his arguments home strongly enough. I believe that those arguments are stronger than those deployed by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State in reply.

9.45 am

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn continued by explaining that the Hearing Aid Council was set up in 1968, and that section 1 of the Hearing Aid Council Act required the council to draw up standards of competence and codes of trade practice for the industry. The significant point is that the 1968 Act gave the Secretary of State only limited powers, as was pointed out several times in Committee. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn said:

> "Even if there were an overwhelming case for change, the Secretary of State would be powerless to intervene if the council refused to act."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 5 April 1989, c. 3.]

His new clause and this new clause represent attempts to redress that balance and correct that imperfection.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn then drew attention to the grave anxiety that had been expressed over the years about the workings of the Hearing Aid Council—the very subject to which my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) referred. It was concluded in Committee that the case for change was overwhelming.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn referred to some startling instances of high-pressure sales techniques, by which vulnerable people had been persuaded to invest in hearing aid equipment costing up to £1,000. I have not encountered such appalling abuses of sales techniques, but I remember clearly trying to help one or two of my constituents who had been pressurised into spending several hundreds of pounds on such equipment.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn stressed the failure of the Hearing Aid Council and pointed out that, under the existing regime, nothing could be done to change the code of practice. He anticipated the Minister's reply to his argument—the same argument that he will perhaps now deploy—that a change in the composition of the council would be sufficient to provide the safeguards that are now missing. The Minister duly replied in that vein in Committee. He acknowledged that there was a fundamental difference between the promoter of the Bill and the Department about the role of the Secretary of State.

I was not present, but I can imagine my hon. Friend the Minister injecting a note of humour into his voice when he pointed out the irony that, in this case, Opposition Members were arguing for an intensification and extension of the powers of the Secretary of State, whereas they usually argue for the reverse. My hon. Friend described himself as "in principle a non-interventionist". The basis of his argument was that there was no need for the Secretary of State to have additional powers and that all would be made well by changing the composition of the council.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Under the new clause, the Secretary of State of the day could decide whether to intervene. The key difference between this new clause and the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) in Committee is that the present one gives the Secretary of State discretionary power to intervene, whereas the new clause moved in Committee placed a compulsion upon him to intervene if things went wrong. If we had a non-interventionist Secretary of State, therefore, there would be no intervention, but if we had an interventionist Secretary of State, no doubt he would use his powers.

Mr. Hunter: My hon. Friend has made a point that I intended to make—no doubt more clearly than I could have done. The new clause is a compromise between the ideas advanced by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn in his new clause and the Minister's non-interventionist attitude; it does not go as far as the first, but is not as reactionary as the second. The Under-Secretary of State's argument is flawed. I say that with great respect. He lays himself open to three charges, which I hope he will answer.

The first is his faith in the belief that, should the council be composed differently, all would be made well. That assumption has not yet been convincingly demonstrated. Secondly, in Committee the Minister failed to perceive the true nature of the Hearing Aid Council, even revised as he would accept it. Thirdly, he does not realise that he is

supporting the creation of a council which still will not have acceptable and adequate powers. I shall examine those three points in detail.

The first charge is that the Minister put too much faith in the assumption that, by changing the composition of the council, all would be well. In Standing Committee he referred to the change in the composition as

"the key provision of the Bill."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 5 April 1989, c. 14.]

He regarded it as a panacea that would correct all the faults and failings in existing custom.

If we look carefully at what the Minister said, we find not an argument but a simple assertion of a point of view. He asserted that, when changed, the council would solve the problem. He gave no reason why he came to that conclusion. He gave almost precisely the opposite. As reported in columns 15 and 16 of *Hansard*, the Minister gave two reasons why he believed the composition of the council should be changed. Neither is that the Bill will give the council sufficient power and thus make the Secretary of State's intervention unnecessary.

First, he stressed that the existing composition of the council puts an unreasonable burden on the chairman. No member of the Standing Committee quarrelled with that. Secondly, he argued that the increase to the 4:4:4 composition of the council would avoid confrontation. Those are the only two reasons that my hon. Friend gave for changing the composition. He did not show why changing the composition would remove the need for, or how it could be used as an argument against, giving extra powers to the Secretary of State.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): I am flattered that my hon. Friend should refer at such length and with such knowledge to my modest interventions in Committee. For the benefit of the House, will he distinguish the arguments about the composition of the council and its powers? He will concede that the Bill would alter both. My argument put the two together. I said that the composition was important but that measures in other parts of the Bill with regard to the council's powers were of equal importance.

Mr. Hunter: I have studied the *Official Report* carefully. I must concede that, if that is the Minister's argument, I do not immediately find it reflected in the columns of *Hansard*. My hon. Friend must be right, and I must be wrong.

The point that I am struggling to make is that there is nothing in the columns of *Hansard* or in the Minister's argument to show that the change in the composition of the council excludes the need to increase the Secretary of State's power. The Minister's argument is not the only one open to that charge. Seven other hon. Members spoke in the debate in Committee. I refer to my hon. Friends the Members for Exeter (Mr. Hannam), for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) and for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), and to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), and the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) as well as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn.

Not one made the point or accepted the argument that a change in composition would remove the need for the Secretary of State to have additional powers. Although, as the Minister suggests, there may be strong arguments against giving the Secretary of State extra powers, they were not demonstrated in Committee.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): After reading the Standing Committee report, I am still confused about what the Under-Secretary of State meant when he said that the Secretary of State should be left with existing reserve powers. It was a short speech by the Minister. I hope that he will be able to elucidate his point further. I have read his speech in Committee carefully. I do not think that he explained to the Committee—I hope that he will explain it to the House in rather more detail—what he means by reserve powers. Perhaps he will compare such reserve powers in the Bill with the other reserve powers that the Secretary of State may exercise in other responsibilities.

Mr. Hunter: I welcome that intervention. The Minister has a lot to explain. His arguments in Standing Committee were far from acceptable even to his hon. Friends.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I sense that, as my hon. Friend proceeds, he is shooting a large number of foxes that would otherwise be run by people such as myself if I had the chance. He is making many important points. What the Under-Secretary of State really would like is a self-regulatory system, which I confess I should like, but we do not have a self-regulatory system in this hearing aid matter: we have an existing framework. The purpose of the new clause, which I support, is to improve that framework. We cannot go back. We cannot try to get the self-regulatory system that I suspect my hon. Friend the Minister would like.

Mr. Hunter: That is a valid observation. I suspect that, when the hon. Member for Ynys Môn decided to embark on this course of action, he had to make a fundamental decision. Was he to seek to reform the existing system, improve what we have, or go back to square one and start again with an entirely different structure? Obviously, he chose the course of effectively reforming the existing system. I agree with him: the right approach was to seek to improve the position, and this Bill does that, with one or two exceptions. But some points must be tightened yet further.

Another charge which one can level against the Minister's argument in Committee is that he failed to appreciate the true nature of the Hearing Aid Council, even as freshly constituted. The Minister said:

"As a principled non-interventionist, I do not believe that Secretaries of State should have more powers than are absolutely necessary".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 5 April 1989; c. 4.]

Those words remind me of an article that appeared in *The Guardian* two or three years ago. I was greatly flattered to be linked with the Minister when *The Guardian* described us as Right-wing libertarians. I do not like that description of myself, but I recall the Minister accepting it with some pleasure. Right-wing libertarian or not, he said that he was a principled non-interventionist.

Surely a principled non-interventionist would not approve what is effectively a quango. We have a Government-appointed committee. Its composition is deliberately changed to avoid confrontation. The Minister hopes that it will conduct its affairs even with a minimum of votes. In Committee, he said that he hoped that its decision would not have to be taken by vote. I do not

[Mr. Hunter]

believe that that is a satisfactory state of affairs. I cannot reconcile with the Minister's right-wing libertarianism his support for such a quango. I believe that, on those grounds, we should look much more carefully at giving the Secretary of State exceptional powers to intervene.

My third reason for believing that we can quarrel with the argument put forward by the Minister is the expression:

"The Secretary of State should be left with the existing reserve powers, but they should not be enhanced."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 5 April 1989; c. 4.]

I shall refer to that when I deal with the new clause in more detail.

10 am

I propound the thesis that the Bill as it stands is inadequate in that the Secretary of State has only reactive rather than proactive powers. If we wish to repair the past damage—as, indeed, we do—surely we must do the job properly and ensure that the Secretary of State has power to act in a proactive rather than a reactive way.

The new clause gives the Secretary of State proactive powers to draw up standards of competence and codes of practice for the hearing industry. At present, as many hon. Members will realise, he can only modify the standards or codes put to him by the council. The purpose of new clause 1 is the same essentially as that put to the Government by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn in Committee. It was rejected there, on the ground that changing the composition of the council to reflect more the interest of hearing aid users would ensure that change could be achieved.

I argue that the council is effectively a quango and its members are appointed by the Secretary of State. While it exists, it must protect effectively the interests of hearing aid users. The new clause would ensure that the Secretary of State could act in the event of a revised standard or code being needed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said in his intervention, the power is discretionary. It does not compel the Secretary of State to act. It provides that he must first consult the council and consider any representations. It does not, therefore, overburden the Secretary of State with executive power. The third part of the new clause would also compel the council to investigate complaints received from the public. At present, the council is under no obligation to do so.

Although I support the Bill very much, I believe that it could be made a better one by the addition of the new clause. I have no hesitation in commending it to hon. Members.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) for the Bill. I was surprised, however, by the number of words used by the hon. Gentleman to describe the new clause, valuable though it is. I never dreamed that he had such a capacity for eloquence, such tremendous descriptive powers or such a great depth of knowledge. I congratulate him on his fine display. I noticed the hon. Member looking at his watch as he spoke. I could not make up my mind whether he was looking at it because he felt that he had been speaking too long or because he felt that he was not filling the time that he had allotted to himself.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke said that the sponsor of the Bill did not stress his points strongly enough in Committee. I have never won the ballot, although I have worked closely with hon. Members who have. I have never won a raffle in my life. If the hon. Member for Basingstoke is ever lucky enough to win the ballot, he will know that one has to be diplomatic and try to work with the Government. The relationship between the sponsor and the Minister has been a good one. I believe that the sponsor was right to indulge in that give and take. He has produced an excellent Bill. If we start interfering, being dogmatic and assertive, we get nowhere. I reject that criticism of the sponsor. I reject, too, the criticisms of the Minister. It is a fine thing when a Member on the Labour Benches defends a Conservative Minister, but I shall like it to go on record that the Minister has done a good job on this Bill.

I did not think that the composition of the council come within the ambit of the new clause. I am not sure whether it would be right to deal with that on Report or on Third Reading. However, I shall comment on it briefly. I believe that the composition of 4:4:4 is crucial. I do not believe that the Minister said that all would be well if that was the position, but he said that it was a significant and important contribution to the Bill. I agree with him. The former composition whereby the hearing aid industry dominated the council was patently absurd, and the 4:4:4 composition is precisely the balance that we need.

The proposed new clause weakens the oversight of the Secretary of State and I do not believe that that will be a good thing. The relationship between the Department of Trade and Industry and the council is tenuous and it should not be weakened further. I think that, as drafted, the clause removes the current power of the Department to approve the modification of standards or codes.

I like the part of the new clause that says that the council "shall" rather than "may" investigate complaints. I believe that the intent of the clause is good. However, if the Minister is not happy with the new clause—I am prepared to be guided by him—I hope that it will be withdrawn.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the Bill, especially on the new clause, and to follow the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), whose contribution on the subject has been so significant. If hon. Members want to appreciate the problems of those with impaired hearing, I refer them to what I believe was one of the most memorable of speeches. I did not hear it but I have read it in detail. It was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) on 24 March. It was moving to read. It must have been even more moving for those who had the privilege of listening to it. We in the House have a particular interest in hearing because of the poor standard of the microphones, which were complained about only yesterday. I say that as someone who is suffering from a temporary hearing deficiency which may get worse. I hope that I will not be in a position to benefit under the Bill.

Mr. Colvin: I know that my hon. Friend represents part of a county where field sports predominate. As a shooting man, does my hon. Friend take the precaution of wearing

ear plugs? A number of people are beginning to suffer from defective hearing because they overlook that important safeguard.

Mr. Baker: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. Of course, I wear ear plugs. I would recommend that many more people, especially those who listen to overloud music in discotheques, do the same, because that clearly is a cause of much damage about which we know far too little.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) has made many of the points that I would have wished to mention. There is a conflict between, on the one hand, having a form of quango or hearing aid council that has powers that will be effective and is composed in the right way, and, on the other, expecting the industry to be a self-regulatory body. I referred to that in an earlier intervention, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say something about it.

I have always preferred the self-regulatory approach. I have worked as a solicitor and that profession operates a closed shop. It is governed on a self-regulatory basis, which has been successful up to a point, although I do not believe that it is the most successful example of self-regulation—perhaps the takeover panel is such an example. I believe that self-regulation is more appropriate to professions where those who transgress the rules can be prevented from practising than to those who make and dispense hearing aids. We must deal with the Hearing Aid Council as it is, and in that spirit I support the new clause.

The composition of the council is relevant to the new clause. The 12-member council—four representatives of the trade, four consumers and four medical or technical experts—will create for the first time a genuinely balanced council with the prospect of consumers having a meaningful voice.

The reason for the new clause is that it is possible that the newly composed Hearing Aid Council will omit something or fail to pick up some complaint. In those circumstances, it is possible that the Secretary of State will want to require the council to submit a code. That is provided for by the new clause.

With those reservations, I believe that the new clause would improve the Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Colvin: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker), and I thank him for his support for the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and myself.

I should first state my credentials for participating in this debate. I was instrumental in pressing the Government for comments on the paper "Hearing Aids: the Case for Change", which was published by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf earlier this year. On 16 March I asked a parliamentary question about those proposals. Interestingly enough, the question was tabled to the Secretary of State for Health, not to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. When the Under-Secretary of State for Health replied, he said that the proposals made by the RNID were being carefully considered. It is obvious that another Department is closely involved with this matter, and this is why I probed the Department of Health rather than the DTI for a response.

Another reason for my participating in the debate is that on a number of occasions I have been approached by my constituents, particularly Mr. Ronald Scurlock of West Wellow, who has had considerable difficulty in getting hearing aids. He has faced delays of up to a year in receiving hearing aids. The Health Service should reconsider the service it provides to those who are hard of hearing.

I was also prompted to participate in this debate by a parliamentary question that I tabled on 15 March to the DTI concerning the Plessey company in my constituency. I was surprised to notice that the question immediately before mine had been tabled by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), who is a leading authority on matters affecting the deaf. His question was:

"To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consideration he is giving to the reform of the Hearing Aid Council."

I had no idea that that was a matter for the DTI and therefore I was interested in the Under-Secretary of State's response.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South pointed out that there were flaws in the membership of the Hearing Aid Council, which he believed favoured the industry. He suggested that the way in which it supervised the industry was absurd and that it should be changed in such a way that consumers rather than the industry which it regulated dominated the council. He also asked the Minister whether he should not take reserve powers:

"to amend any code of practice or standard put forward by that council so that he can keep a watch on future developments?"—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. 405.]

That was a logical request and it is provided for by this new clause.

When the Under-Secretary replied to the right hon. Gentleman's question—we shall hear what he has to say later today—he skated around the right hon. Gentleman's proposals. He said that he had faith in changing the composition of the council which would ensure that it was effective and representative. I have my doubts.

10.15 am

Another reason for my participating this morning is that I have been approached by Mr. J. Hague, who heads the Hythe hard of hearing club. I received a letter in this week's post from him drawing my attention to the fact that the Bill was coming back on Report today and he said:

"The Bill is so important to hearing-impaired people that I earnestly ask you to stay in the House on that day."

Well, here I am.

My other reason for participating today is that I have a profoundly deaf godson. Evan Gibbs is 12 years old—his birthday was yesterday. His mother had German measles and that is why he was born profoundly deaf. He used to wear a phonic ear, which meant that he could tune into his teacher. He has now graduated to what is known as the post-aural aid, which is a great success. His condition is annually reviewed by Wiltshire county council, which is the local education authority. What is so important, particularly for children at school, is that there is always close liaison between the local education authority and the district health authority, which operates the ear, nose and throat unit that carries out such investigations.

Although we are extremely critical of the industry, I have found no evidence to suggest that there is any high-pressure selling of these extremely sophisticated appliances.

Mr. Barry Porter *indicated assent.*

Mr. Colvin: I note that my hon. Friend is nodding in agreement. I know that he has an interest in this matter. Incidentally, when I spoke in the House about the licence trade during the passage of other legislation, I always made the point of declaring my pecuniary interest in that matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) intervened earlier. Perhaps he would like to clarify that matter.

Mr. Porter: I intend to speak in this debate later if I catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye. At the beginning of that speech I would declare my interest, that from time to time I advise the Hearing Aid Association—a trade association of private dispensers. I make it clear that that interest is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests, but I would have said that during my speech.

Mr. Colvin: I am obliged to my hon. Friend, and I am glad that we have cleared up that point. May I say—I am sure that this will be echoed by other hon. Members—that that association is extremely lucky to have the services of my hon. Friend.

The new clause was ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke. I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on his selection of subject and the way in which he has steered the Bill's passage so far. One is fortunate in this place if one's Bill obtains a Second Reading on the nod. It is a great credit to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn that his Bill took only one Committee sitting and that he gained the support of Committee members and of Members from all parties. Such progress demonstrates a remarkable degree of unanimity across the party divides which too often separate us.

I should also like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), whose debate on hearing aids on 23 March was extremely interesting to read. It has made us much more authoritative on the subject than we would otherwise have been. The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South is a robust campaigner on behalf of the deaf and is the current president of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf. We listen to him carefully.

I shall also mention someone who is, alas, no longer in the House, Mr. Laurie Pavitt, the former Member for Brent, South. Laurie and I crossed swords in this Chamber on many occasions. I once represented a constituency with considerable tobacco interests and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will remember, because you were in the same so-called lobby, that Laurie was determined that tobacco advertising should stop. He and I spent many hours in the Chamber debating that issue. It was due to him and his efforts back in 1968 that the first hearing aid Bill was introduced in the House of Lords and the Hearing Aid Council was set up.

One problem with uncontroversial Bills is that they remain unchallenged. People consider them highly desirable and, therefore, they sail through without any real probing. That is why I was interested to see from yesterday's Order Paper, when we received the first inkling of which new clauses and amendments would be tabled, that there were no fewer than five new clauses and six amendments. It would be wholly improper for me to question the Chair's selection today, but we are debating only one new clause and one amendment. Both of those are significant and important and should improve the Bill, but I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will use the discretion for which you are famous to permit us to stray a little on to the subjects covered by the other amendments that have not been selected, or at least will give us some time to mention them on Third Reading. It is important that in such debates we put down markers for the other place to consider when they debate the Bill, providing it receives its Third Reading today.

In the other place, in May 1968, the Hearing Aid Council Bill began its parliamentary journey, which concluded with the setting up of the Hearing Aid Council. The council is made up of Government-appointed members, six of whom are industry representatives and five consumer representatives, and it has an independent chairperson. The general function of the council, according to section 1 of the 1968 Act, is to secure

"adequate standards of competence and conduct among persons engaged in dispensing hearing aids"

That is done by registering dispensers of hearing aids, advising on training and regulating trade practices with a code of practice. All private sector suppliers of hearing aids operate under the Hearing Aid Council and its code of practice.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Hearing Aid Council provides the valuable function of setting examinations for hearing aid dispensers and dealing with their results? Does he further agree that it is ludicrous that two different sets of examinations are run for hearing aid dispensers, one by the National Health Service and one by the private hearing aid service? What is the purpose of these two completely different examinations which result in two different streams of people emerging to give this crucial, though small, service to the public?

Mr. Colvin: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for her intervention; but her question should more correctly be directed to the Under-Secretary of State who is to reply to the debate. I agree that there is no logic in what she describes, and it seems pointless to have two sets of examinations, particularly when the Ministry responsible is the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department of Health has been mentioned, and its involvement in this subject is important. There is a good case for saying that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary should not be sitting on the Front Bench today. He is always welcome, but a Minister from the Department of Health would be far more relevant.

The Hearing Aid Council is felt by some, including the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, to be ineffectual because of the limited sanctions it can impose in cases of non-compliance. I was pleased to see that amendment No. 2 has also been selected for debate because the matter of imposing sanctions on people who break the rules and the code of conduct is important.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I shall return to the question of dual qualifications. Perhaps when the Minister responds he will comment on this matter. If there are two layers and two alternative standards within the profession, what will happen in relation to our comparability with our European counterparts? Will people who wish to practise in this country post 1992 have to meet the standards of the private or the public sector?

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which underlines the importance of ensuring the highest

standards. We do not need to attain harmonisation in Europe, because that would be too broad a concept. However, we must ensure that the qualifications of professional people are of the highest standard. In most cases we accept people from Europe with doctorates and qualifications of a lower standard than those in this country, but those standards must be brought up to our own, otherwise such people should not be permitted to practise.

Miss Nicholson: Does not my hon. Friend agree that our goal in relation to hearing aid dispensing and the relevant examinations should be to achieve the best practice? Undeniably, the Germans have introduced the best practices and we should take careful note of the way in which the Germans have made the dispensers of hearing aids part of their paramedical team and have a better system than we do. We should not knock our European colleagues when their practices are better than ours.

Mr. Colvin: I am reassured to learn that German standards are higher than ours. Siemens, which is a large company that is trying to take over the Plessey company in my constituency, is much involved with hearing aids. It is a most unwelcome takeover bid—I could not miss the opportunity of making that constituency point. Siemens is an extremely powerful company and it is nonsense to set fines for people who break the rules on hearing aids at £1,000. Siemens could afford to pay £1 million and still not notice it.

Miss Nicholson: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should welcome the Minister who is here today from the Department of Trade and Industry because he will be interested in takeover problems, whereas a Minister responsible for health would not be?

10.30 am

Mr. Colvin: I am obliged to my hon. Friend. If we are not careful, we shall be called to order, and the Minister will not know whether he is listening to a debate on hearing aids or a debate on takeovers.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I want to sound a note of caution at this point. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) has mentioned standards in Germany. One of the dangers facing a variety of industries in Britain is that the European Commission will start to lay down standards oriented towards the German rather than the British economy. It will give the Germans a great advantage in 1992 and thereafter if we do not lay down slightly more general standards for the future.

Mr. Colvin: I take the point, but my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not reply in detail to it. I am sure that the Minister has heard it.

Miss Nicholson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Colvin: I am afraid not, because we must make progress.

I want to say a word or two about the background and to refer to the document, "Hearing Aids: the Case for Change", put out by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf. Incidentally, I pay tribute to Rosalind Oakley, the institute's parliamentary officer, who has been of enormous help to hon. Members in preparing for this debate and, in general, with matters relating to the deaf. The House will be interested to note that there are 350 ENT consultants in this country. There are 700 audiology technicians and 635 registered private dispensers. But there are 3·9 million people with hearing loss who might be helped by a hearing aid. The Government have been very good about taking advice from the specialists. Their views are always noted, but the RNID's point is that it is high time that the consumers' case—the case of these 3·9 million people—was given a fair hearing.

The present hearing aid services are failing to satisfy many chronic problems and consumers are not receiving the service that they should. In the first place, there are long waiting lists. I mentioned earlier the case of one of my constituents. The average wait for an ENT appointment is 16 weeks, and it can take up to two years to get an appointment. A further 14 weeks can often pass before a consumer is finally fitted with a hearing aid.

There is a staffing crisis in the Health Service. In some parts of the country hearing aid services have virtually collapsed because of these shortages and because of problems with recruiting new audiology technicians. There are certain neglected groups. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has carried out a disability survey which identified almost 250,000 adults with hearing loss who are living in communal establishments. Almost without exception, hospital departments cannot offer services to those consumers.

It is also important to record the worries about inconvenient locations. For many people, the hospital hearing aid centre is neither local nor convenient. Consumers are obliged to attend at least two or three times to obtain their first hearing aid, and in most places they must return whenever they need batteries or a replacement aid. That is not good enough.

The RNID also believes that the service is ineffective. After receiving a hearing aid, 20 per cent. of consumers do not use it. Studies and pilot projects have confirmed that use and benefit can be maximised by good advice on fitting and follow-up visits to deal with any problems, but that cannot easily be done by a hospital-based service that is already under strain. We believe that there is inadequate protection.

Many consumers buying an aid privately from a dispenser who visits their home find that they are subject to high pressure sales methods—a point that was touched on earlier. They lack information about the conditions of sale and the back-up services that they can expect. The Hearing Aid Council is charged by Parliament with maintaining standards of trade practice, but it fails to do so effectively.

Training has already been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West. People who test and fit hearing aids and give advice on their use in the private sector are trained differently from those who do so in the NHS. The two sectors have no commonly agreed and recognised standard of training.

The Government are reviewing the organisation of the National Health Service now. Surely this is a golden opportunity to review hearing aid services. I congratulate the Royal National Institute for the Deaf on having examined the strengths and weaknesses of the NHS alongside the benefits and abuses in the private sector, and on the way in which it has argued the need for a reorganised system in its 28-page booklet, "Hearing Aids: the Case for Change".

[Mr. Colvin]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke said, this new clause is similar to one moved in Committee. The fundamental difference is that this one gives the Government the discretion to intervene; it does not place a mandatory obligation on them to do so. We must ask whether the Hearing Aid Council is doing its job properly. There are obvious doubts about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West wants to abolish the council altogether——

Miss Nicholson: I am a sponsor of this excellent Bill and I congratulate its originator sincerely. Ultimately, I believe that the present proposals in no way match the overriding need. We shall have to look further at a later stage than this Bill to find the solution that we seek.

Mr. Colvin: That was a useful intervention. I draw the attention of the House to the speech made by my hon. Friend on this subject earlier this year. Their Lordships should read it, too, because it was important.

We must ask whether the council has succeeded in drawing up adequate standards of competence and codes of trade practice in this important industry. Many people think that it has not. On March 15, my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) asked my hon. Friend the Minister when he last reviewed the Hearing Aid Council's code of practice. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary replied:

"The Hearing Aid Council Act does not require or permit the Secretary of State to review the council's code of practice. The Act requires the Secretary of State to approve the code proposed by the council and any amendments that it proposes to it. The Secretary of State can make his approval conditional upon certain modifications."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. *261*.]

Perhaps this power to impose conditions provides what we want. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will expand a little on that when he replies to the debate.

As things stand, the Secretary of State can only modify standards and codes that are put to him by the council. He has no proactive powers. Even if there were an overwhelming demand for change, the Secretary of State would be quite powerless to act or to intervene if the council itself refused to act. A good example was given in Standing Committee C, and all I shall do is to draw the attention of the House to the opening paragraphs of column 4 of the *Official Report*, because there is no point in putting something on the record twice.

The Government are demonstrating a benign faith in the composition of the council and are hoping that that will solve the problems. I believe—this is the purpose of new clause 1—that the Secretary of State should have reserve powers to fall back on if necessary. When my hon. Friend replies to the debate, I should like him to explain why he feels that such powers are not necessary.

New clause 1 would allow the Secretary of State to intervene in the running of what we can only describe as a quango. I was under the impression that this Government were pretty good at abolishing quangos. Therefore, I take up the challenge issued by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West and suggest that the Secretary of State might extend his quango hunt in this instance. While it exists, the council must protect the interests of hearing aid users.

Miss Nicholson *rose*——

Mr. Colvin Yes, I shall give way once more, but then I must conclude.

Miss Nicholson: The accepted definition of the word "quango" is something appointed and paid for by the Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that we have an even more peculiar anomaly here, because the Hearing Aid Council may be appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but it pays for its activities itself?

Mr. Colvin: The funding of the Hearing Aid Council is another major issue that should be addressed in the other place. I understand that the council is funded by raising fees from manufacturers registered with it. That raises the question of the role of the council. With the opticians, the General Optical Council is given a much wider brief to undertake training and other duties and has a broader source of funding, including Government money.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Will the hon. Gentleman accept from me that a substantial proportion of the council's costs over the years has been related to disciplinary proceedings and that the cost of disciplinary proceedings to the council is particularly heavy? Does he agree that one of the merits of the Bill is that under it a disciplinary committee can order a dispenser who has breached its code of discipline to pay the costs of that hearing and that in that way the costs of the council could be significantly reduced?

Mr. Colvin: I am most obliged for that intervention as it raises an extremely important point. I hope that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) will succeed in catching your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I am sure that the House would like to know his views on new clause 1.

The new clause would compel the council to investigate complaints from the public. At present it is under no obligation to do so. I do not believe that that proposal would mean that the Government would become interventionist. I understand the reluctance of a Conservative Government to take any form of additional powers. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State made that clear in Committee. The present system, which was set up under the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968, has not worked well and will have little to celebrate on its 21st birthday on 24 May. Incidentally, that is only two days after the birthday of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn, who has promoted the Bill, and who, I believe, will be celebrating his 40th birthday two days earlier. I thought that when the Conservative Government were elected 10 years ago, on 3 May—another celebration is coming up soon—they were in the business of abolishing the Department of Trade—

Mr. Forth: What?

10.45 am

Mr. Colvin: Yes, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State was in Europe at the time and probably does not remember the manifesto on which we fought that election.

The Department of Trade and Industry is a wholly interventionist body which we do not need unless we need to intervene in industry. It may have some benefit to the economy, but I reckon that the old Board of Trade was very much better. In fact, it was the old Board of Trade that featured in the original 1968 Act. The nub of what we are saying this morning is that the Department of Trade

and Industry is the wrong Department and that the Department of Health should be responsible in this sphere——

Miss Nicholson *rose*——

Mr. Colvin: No I shall not give way, because I must conclude.

I think that the Royal National Institute for the Deaf got it right. We must ask whether the Hearing Aid Council should be a medical council. We could well look at the workings of the General Optical Council, which is the equivalent of the General Medical Council and the General Dental Council. They are statutory health bodies with twin responsibilities for education and training, and with disciplinary functions. We are in the middle of reforming the National Health Service, and this is a superb opportunity for us to do something about the Hearing Aid Council.

I am a strong supporter of the Bill and support my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, who moved new clause 1 so ably. It is essentially a probing provision. I do not think that there will be any question of pressing it at the end of the debate. We shall listen with great interest to what the Under-Secretary of State says in reply, and I hope that our remarks this morning will be noted carefully in the other place when the Bill reaches there, as I am sure that it will.

Mr. Bowis: I shall not follow some of the discussions that have taken place during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), much as I enjoyed the points that he made, especially on quangos. It seems to be not so much a question of sine qua non as sine qua quango, but we could look at that issue on another day.

First, I congratulate the hon. Member for what I know as Anglesey, but what I think *Hansard* knows as Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on bringing the Bill to the House. It is a good measure and I hope that we shall shortly speed it on its way through its Third Reading and into implementation.

I pay tribute also to the Bill's co-sponsors. It is good that the next two names on the Bill are those of the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), who have shown just how an individual can overcome the difficulties of disability and play an active part, not least in the highest chamber of the realm.

However, we need to assist those who, through no fault of their own, cannot achieve such heights and ambitions, and this measure is geared to making life a little easier for them. The House of Commons is at its best when dealing with such issues. It comes together to represent those who need our assistance, and this is one of those occasions on which there is virtual unanimity of view that we want to do our best by such people. I am sure that the promoter of the Bill will agree with that.

It was interesting to note that the record of the proceedings in Committee reflected the good will on all sides. If I have one slight criticism of the Bill's sponsor it is that he seemed occasionally all too ready to accede to the Minister's persuasive powers, not least on questions of comparability. I understand the reasons for seeking comparability with other measures, but occasionally one should say that, if a solution is right for one problem but out of kilter with other measures, perhaps it is the other measures that should be brought into line. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) will develop that theme.

The key sentence in the briefing material provided by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf was the request that, whatever we did to improve the service, it should be geared to the consumer and not to the specialist or the salesman. That is right, because we must put the consumer first.

We all have knowledge of deafness. Some hon. Members may have close family members who suffer from deafness, as I have. In some instances, deafness is present from birth, while in others it comes later in life. It is almost worse when it comes later in life, because then one knows what one has lost. For someone who has had full hearing earlier in life, the frustration that comes when hearing starts to fade is extremely painful and difficult for others to understand. Perhaps the measure will enable more people to understand that frustration. The purpose of the new clause is to push that a little further.

I have experience in my family of the provision of equipment, and I know that a long time is needed for adjustment. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West spoke about that in the excellent debate that she initiated. All too often, there is a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. We need to ensure that there is a good basic after-sales service. That service should apply not only to the equipment, to make sure that it is in working order, but to the user, to make sure that he is in working order and able to use the equipment adequately. Above all, it is a question of making sure that the after-sales servicer has the patience to encourage and train the user of the equipment.

I shall give another example of an area in which we need to keep pushing in order to improve the service. I remember a visit I paid to a consitutent: eventually, after a great deal of knocking on the door, I gained admittance and found the elderly lady watching television with the sound turned off. I asked her why she did not have the sound on. Eventually, when she could understand what I was saying, she said, "I cannot hear the sound so there is no point in having it on." I asked her why she did not get a hearing aid, and she said, "I have a hearing aid, but I cannot make it work." She had a soundless television and was leading a soundless existence, even though she had a hearing aid that she could wear. The problem was that she could not cope with the little wheel that adjusted the volume, because she had arthritic fingers.

Codes of practice are needed in such cases to make sure that alternatives are provided for such people. We do not want the take-it-or-leave-it attitude one sometimes sees. In that instance, I spoke to somebody from the industry and he was helpful in locating a suitable piece of equipment. However, my meeting with him was by pure chance, and the first people that I asked from the social services and elsewhere did not know of anything that was suitable for people with arthritic fingers.

The new clause takes us a little further in keeping the pressure on. I know that the Hearing Aid Council is involved in training and education qualifications. The measure may encourage the council to play a wider role in the community so that we can get closer to the prevention of some hearing problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) talked about noise, which may be the noise of shooting or of music in

[Mr. Bowis]

the ear. If we can prevent, we will not need to cure, but when we need to cure, we must do it with compassion and patience, using all the technology that is at our disposal.

Miss Nicholson: Hon. Members were kind enough to let me intervene during their speeches. I should like to comment on some of the important points raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis). The first matter is prevention. I think first of the 12-year-old who is profoundly deaf because his mother had measles, although I suspect it was probably German measles. What more compelling reason could there be for seeking to transfer responsibility for hearing aid provision from the Department of Trade and Industry—unfairly beleaguered in the debate over its interventionist stance, but that is another story—to the Department of Health?

The prevention of deafness through immunisation against German measles should be common in this country. I was distressed to learn that a boy of 12 should have been born profoundly deaf because his mother had what I suspect must have been German measles. Presumably, that was because she had not been immunised. I am deafened because my mother had German measles when she was carrying me, but I am 47 and when I was born immunisation was not commonplace. The magnificent thing about being a woman Member of Parliament is that one is perennially young, which is a great relief. The men get older, but we do not.

Children should not be born deaf through lack of immunisation and I am anxious to see the Department of Health attending to immunisation through education programmes persuading mothers to be immunised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea said that technology and dispensers must be user-friendly. Here I must part company with him, despite his great sympathy and understanding for those who suffer from a handicap and fail to find the proper technical provision. I have first-class hearing aids and sometimes can hear all too much in this place.

The National Health Service is technologically far outstripped by private sector provision of hearing aids. That shows that competition is important, because it means that innovation thrives, most properly, in the private sector. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) would not wish me to press that point too strongly. There are many different varieties of hearing aids with different refinements in the private sector, but the National Health Service is still in the age of the dinosaur.

I also take issue with my hon. Friend about the quality of the after-care service or the dispensers in the National Health Service. The after-care service is first-class and cannot be faulted. National Health Service dispensers are gravely let down by the paucity of technological development in the hearing aids that they provide. That is the problem, and there is no point in saying that the 250 or so varieties of hearing aid that the private dispensers can offer will ever be transported into the National Health Service system. Technological change continues and it outstrips the NHS.

We have to take NHS funding for hearing aid provision away from the major hospitals and into the private sector, into the high street. What a ludicrous situation; there are well over 3·5 million people who need hearing aids—I believe that that estimate is far too low—yet the way we offer them hearing aids is to force them to have appointments with 350 ear, nose and throat surgeons who surely have better things to do, since probably more than 95 per cent. of people with hearing loss cannot be helped surgically. Thus the time of ENT surgeons is wasted, and people are disadvantaged for no good purpose. The screening method in the National Health Service for the provision of hearing aids is so fine that it is effectively stopping people from getting the aids.

11 am

It is crucial that the best training be offered and the best qualifications obtained within the dispensing service; hence the need for one set of examinations. It is no good suggesting that the hospital examinations are superior to the private ones: that is not so—they are merely different. It is very important that there be one standard under the Secretary of State for Health, because, unlike the provision of spectacles, if someone is given a significantly wrong hearing aid, his hearing can be irrevocably damaged.

That is why the training of dispensers to the highest possible standard is most important. I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, together with the Secretary of State for Health, to look at the experience in Europe, particularly in Germany, and let us have a Hearing Aid Council under the Secretary of State for Health, together with a first-class self-funded trade association that elects its own members democratically and is not dictated to by the Government of the day. We do not want this peculiar, unbalanced animal, which unfairly forces the private hearing aid industry to pay for an organisation whose members it cannot elect. I believe that that is the way forward, even though this is an excellent Bill, albeit a temporary measure.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): As one of the sponsors of the Bill, I should like to add my congratulations on what I believe will be an admirable first step in the necessary improvements for people with hearing loss. I have first-hand experience of the hearing aid syndrome, being the mother of a 16-year-old boy who lost his hearing as a result of my having rubella in pregnancy. All too sadly, that problem has not been satisfactorily resolved.

There has been considerable debate about the quality of hearing aids offered by the National Health Service. To date, my experience has been entirely of services offered by the NHS. There are inadequacies and major problems. It is a tragedy for a teenager to see aids available in the private sector that are far more discreet than those they have to wear at an age when they are very sensitive about their appearance.

The National Health Service, however, is a most tolerant organisation for young people who have to wear hearing aids. It is a fact that young people and hearing aids are often rather incompatible. On occasion, my son has jumped into a swimming pool having forgotten to take his hearing aid out, and has ruined it. He has also, in a fit of temper, thrown a hearing aid across the room. In such cases, the NHS has a strength we would never find in the private sector. It understands the frustrations and difficulties faced by young people wearing hearing aids, and it will replace them in such circumstances.

Mr. Ashley: I agree with every word spoken by the hon. Lady. Does she not agree with me that what she is saying makes a powerful case for more resources to be devoted to the National Health Service?

Mrs. Barnes: I agree absolutely. Like many other parents of children with hearing aids, I am facing strong pressure from my son for a hearing aid that fits entirely in the ear. His consultant has advised me that it would be entirely suitable for his hearing loss. As a teenager growing into the difficult years, he is naturally most concerned not just about how well he can hear but about how he looks. In fact, if he had to choose, he would often decide that how he looks is more important than how well he can hear. He will pretend he can hear when he cannot in situations when he would feel embarrassed to wear a hearing aid. This situation presents a powerful case for what the NHS offers young people.

If the only options available at the moment are in the private sector, I pose a serious question about the penalties applicable for malpractice. If, as I suspect, I will have to spend a considerable sum over the next few years, once my son is fully grown—growing children make very different demands on the hearing service than do fully grown adults—I believe the protections should be very sound. I feel that the service should be free, since I believe my son's hearing loss is no fault of his own—and no fault of mine, either.

All too frequently we hear of pensioners having laid out large sums for hearing aids that just do not work. They either whistle and distort sound or they pick up background noise disproportionately. For one reason or another, these people just cannot get on with their hearing aids. Although the NHS may be slow and there may be inconvenience for out-patients, the follow-up service is guaranteed. This aspect must be considered carefully in relation to the private sector. I strongly support further regulation and certainly stiffening the penalties against anyone guilty of malpractice in this area.

I return to the point raised by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). We are considering a health problem because of which, through no fault of their own, people suffer severe hearing loss. They need a hearing aid. I believe that technological developments within the hearing aid industry should be made available within the NHS.

Mr. Forth: I must resist any temptation to be drawn down the path of replying to some of the valid and knowledgeable points made by hon. Members about provisions through the National Health Service vis-a-vis the private sector, or about the responsibilities of the Department of Trade and Industry vis-a-vis the Department of Health. As I see it, these are not legitimately appropriate points for this debate, although I believe that hon. Members were correct to include them.

I will concentrate on the new clause, and, first, I shall deal with the two more subsidiary points. New clause 1 proposes to change the phrase "Board of Trade" in the original 1968 Act to "Secretary of State". I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) that this was done some time ago and the Secretary of State for Health has already identified it in the current version of the Act. Thus, that part of the new clause is redundant.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) referred to a matter that has not been picked up by many other hon. Members when he said that he preferred "shall investigate" to "may investigate". I understand his reasons, but at present the system is that complaints are initially considered by the chairman and registrar of the council. They make a judgment whether the complaint is sufficiently serious to be referred to the disciplinary committee. That acts as a very useful filter.

The trouble with the wording of the new clause is that, if we were to force the disciplinary committee to consider every complaint, no matter how trivial or irrelevant—and there are a few like that—we would place an additional burden on the council and the committee and its resources. That is unnecessary, because there is every evidence that the present system works satisfactorily against a background—this is a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) made earlier—of a number of complaints. However, the House might want to be aware that the number of complaints is surprisingly small.

The main point at issue is the argument whether we want to give the Secretary of State greater positive or proactive powers in this matter. I have listened to the debate carefully, and I have re-read the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968. I remain convinced that the provisions in the original Act, which so far we have not seen fit to change, are still adequate to deal with the kind of things that will be before the council.

According to the 1968 Act, the council shall submit to the Secretary of State for his written approval any standard or code drawn up. The Secretary of State, in approving that standard or code, may make the approval conditional on its being modified in such a manner as he may require. The Act contains real powers at the moment. Those powers are satisfactory and adequate, particularly in this context.

Many hon. Members have referred to the composition of the council. In changing the council's composition, as the Standing Committee did and as I hope the House will endorse today, we have produced a council that will have a different outlook and will look more closely at codes of conduct, training and many other matters that may be within its remit. It will therefore be able to have a relationship with the Secretary of State within the existing provisions of the 1968 Act that will operate much better, in a way that hon. Members would want.

For the reasons that I gave in Standing Committee I would, with regret, strongly urge the House not to accept the new clause if it is pressed.

Mr. Colvin: The Minister places a benign faith in the council's composition. My hon. Friend replied to a question from the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on 1 February. He stated that he carefully consulted certain bodies when making appointments to the Hearing Aid Council. He said that, in particular, he consulted the Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists and the Hearing Aid Industry Association about appointments representing the dispensers. He also referred to a long list of organisations that he consulted which have technical knowledge of deafness and audiological technical knowledge with reference to appointments of members representing the interests of the hard of hearing. I will not read out that list, because I gave my hon. Friend the Minister a copy before the debate started.

The whole question of nominations is terribly important. How much does my hon. Friend consult? Will

[Mr. Colvin]

he tell us a little more about the consultation process? How much advice does he take from members of the public? In his reply on 1 February, my hon. Friend said that he would consult and that he was prepared to listen to representations made by any member of the public with a problem who cared to come and see him.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has made an important point and I can give him the assurances he seeks. I agree that it will always be important fully to consult interested and knowledgeable bodies in these matters against the background of the change in the council's composition agreed by the Standing Committee, which will give users and consumers greater representation.

We also believe that we should, and give an undertaking that we will, consult those bodies to which my hon. Friend has referred, but, as I stated in my reply on 1 February:

"it is open to any member of the public with genuine involvement in the dispensing of hearing aids or with the hearing-impaired or who has specialised technical knowledge of deafness to make nominations. All nominations are considered on their merits."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1989; Vol. 146, c. *262*.]

I go further than that: we will always be prepared to consider the names of people given to us in good faith who could claim to represent the consumer of the product in a more general sense or in a private capacity, instead of necessarily always representing a particular body.

We have the facility for, and we intend to have, the widest possible representation on the reconstituted council to ensure that it is thoroughly representative and can carry the confidence of the dispensers, the industry and the consumers. After all, we must be most concerned with the users of the product and to guarantee, as far as we can, to deliver a satisfactory product that will meet their needs.

11.15 am

Mr. Colvin: That was a very useful reply. How many of the 12 bodies which my hon. Friend the Minister listed in his reply on 1 February took the trouble to see him? We are saying that there must be consultations and the door must be open. However, do people take the trouble to put forward nominations?

Mr. Forth: When we look for nominees, we find that most of the bodies respond in one way or another. Our liaison and contact with them is, as far as I am aware, to their satisfaction and is fully workable. If there are any difficulties, I want to hear about them to ensure that they do not persist.

Perhaps I have not replied to all the points that my hon. Friends may have raised, and I apologise for that. If the new clause is pressed, I regret that I must ask the House to reject it, for the reasons that I have given. On that basis, I hope that we can make good progress and see the matter to a conclusion.

Mr. Hunter: I am in something of a dilemma. I genuinely believe that this Bill would be better with the addition of the new clause and, after nearly two hours of debate, I detect that quite a number of right hon. and hon. Members agree with me.

On the other hand, my hon. Friend the Minister is very positive in his assurance that the new clause is not needed. Whenever possible, one wants to avoid the hassle of a Division on a Friday morning. There is a way forward. As several hon. Members have said, hon. Members on both sides of the House will be watching the workings of the Bill very carefully. We may choose to come back to it in future. On that understanding, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

PENALTIES

Mr. Leigh: I beg to move Amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 5, leave out '£1,000 and insert '£3,000'.

We have spent nearly one and three quarters hours debating new clause 1. Given that this is a worthwhile Bill and that such private Members' Bills are delicate creatures, I intend to speak very briefly.

Just because I have chosen to be brief, I hope that the House is not fooled into believing that this is anything but a very important amendment, that has much support. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will take the amendment seriously.

Hitherto, the only sanction available was to remove a dispenser's name from the register. The penalty is now set at £1,000. In this regard, I want to refer to some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) in Standing Committee. He made some worthwhile comments about the lack of efficacy of such a low penalty and he referred to the turnover of the companies involved.

A brief from the Royal National Institute for the Deaf bears that point out. It states:

"The RNID very much welcomes the Bill including the above measures, however, it believes that the suggestion in the Bill for a fine of £1,000 is inadequate. The cost of a hearing aid is between £300 and £800. In some cases individuals need not one, but two aids, with a resultant cost in excess of £1,000. Clearly the customer may have suffered a loss in excess of £1,000. It cannot be right that the guilty dispenser should pay a lesser price."

The brief that right hon. and hon. Members received sums up the remarks of the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South in Standing Committee C.

When I read the proceedings of that Committee, I was surprised to learn of the turnover enjoyed by companies in the hearing aid industry. Perhaps I should not be, given the number of people who, sadly, suffer from deafness. In the year ending October 1987, Scrivens Ltd., for example, had a turnover of more than £8 million, and in the year ending May 1987, Ultratone Ltd. achieved turnover of more than £11 million and net profits after taxation in excess of £500,000.

In Standing Committee C, the right hon. Gentleman spoke of a penalty of £20,000. My hon. Friend the Minister rejected that proposal, saying that that figure was far too high. However, many of us believe that, given the turnover and profits available to many companies in the industry, a £1,000 penalty is derisory. It may be argued that such a penalty is in line with that stipulated in the Opticians Act 1958. That Act is complex, and I do not claim to be an expert, but it seems to me that the other penalties that can be imposed on opticians are more severe, and the regulatory framework tighter, than in the hearing aid industry. The RNID brief points out:

"The Council is poorly equipped to discipline dispensers, and thus has a poor record of disciplinary action. The Disciplinary Committee of the Council has met just five times

since 1976, and in those twelve years it has struck off only one dispenser. In the 21 years of its existence it has met only twelve times and struck off only seven dispensers. This contrasts with over 300 cases of complaint sent to Mr. Wyn Jones."

The powers of the Hearing Aid Council are weak, and for the first time we are giving it the authority to impose fines. Given the industry's high turnover, my hon. Friend must surely accept that a £1,000 fine is very low. I do not suggest a fine as high as £20,000. In Standing Committee C, my hon. Friend the Minister made pertinent points about such a high penalty conflicting with the practice elsewhere. However, I understand that accountants can be fined £3,000. In view of the potential financial loss and anguish caused to the mainly elderly people who are vulnerable to malpractice in the hearing aid industry, it is not too much to ask that the penalty be increased to £3,000.

Mr. Ashley: I support the amendment, the case for which was put very well by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who became positively brilliant when he quoted my speech in Standing Committee. I put my case in detail on that occasion and do not propose to go over that ground again. However, the hon. Gentleman correctly reported my suggestion for a £20,000 fine. I support the proposal to increase the penalty from £1,000 to £3,000. I suggested £20,000 because that was the figure suggested to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf by a private hearing aid dispenser as a reasonable sum. I did not pluck that figure out of thin air. A £3,000 fine would be reasonable and the case for it is very strong. I hope that the Minister will give that proposal his sympathetic consideration.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): I also strongly support the amendment. The vast majority of hearing aid dispensers are people of the highest integrity and of complete honesty. None the less, the Bill is not attempting to deal with the vast majority but with a minority—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The conversation that is being conducted by the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends is interfering with his speech, which the Chair would like to hear.

Sir Charles Morrison: I was not quite sure whether I could hear it because my hearing aid was turned up too loudly, or whether it was the fault of my hon. Friends.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I could hear two speeches through my hearing aid.

Sir Charles Morrison: The amendment seeks to deal with the potentially small number of dispensers who take deaf people for a ride. In Committee, the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Ashley) made a short, sharp and pertinent speech about the need to increase the fine to £20,000. I greatly sympathise with his sentiments. However, as is the way in Committee on a private Member's Bill, and given the extent of support for the Bill, there was great anxiety to complete its Committee stage swiftly. Therefore, those right hon. and hon. Members who served on the Committee were reluctant to speak at length on any subject for fear that the Bill might run out of time. I am delighted that, in the larger forum of the House, we have an opportunity to return to the subject of penalties and to discuss it in greater depth.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Minister said that the penalty should not be out of line with those applied in comparable circumstances. He quoted the Opticians Act 1958 and the Solicitors Act 1974. The obvious reply is that both Acts are out of date in relation to the penalties that they incorporate. In reality, a £1,000 penalty in 1958 is equivalent to at least £10,000 today. Even the Solicitors Act penalty of £3,000 in 1974 is the equivalent of about £8,000 now. Therefore, the right hon. Gentlemen's proposal in Committee for a £20,000 penalty was not particularly oppressive, and the modest increase to £3,000 proposed in the amendment is the barest minimum level of fine that should be imposed.

People suffering from hearing defects can be very vulnerable to the activities of the dishonest person attempting to make a fast buck. Hearing deficiencies are extremely frustrating. If one takes an eye test and, as a result, purchases a pair of spectacles, one immediately knows whether those spectacles allow one to see better. If need be, one can hand them back and complain that they are not good enough. However, it takes quite a time to become used to a hearing aid. One has to work one's way in, so to speak—and I am still doing so. It is very easy for the slick salesman to say, "Give it another six weeks," but at the end of those six weeks it would probably be impossible for the purchaser of a dud hearing aid to persuade the person from whom it was purchased to take it back—even if that person were available. The level of fine proposed is much more of a deterrent, to try to ensure that the slick salesman is made to think twice before he sets about his dishonest activities.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is prepared to give that aspect further consideration. I do not understand why penalties that were fixed 15 and 30 years ago in other legislation are considered relevant comparisons in specifying a fine that is to be included in a Bill in 1989.

Mr. Forth: We are dealing with an important point, but I shall try to deal with it briefly while, I hope, doing justice to it. I am somewhat surprised at the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). Bearing in mind his profession and regard for the law and its niceties and subtleties, he will understand better than most why I received strong advice from the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office that it was important that we retain an element of balance, comparability and relativity in the penalties available to the law. That must be achieved not only in magistrates courts and Crown courts but in the context of the Bill. I reiterate the point that I made in Standing Committee—we must not allow the penalties to get out of line on one item, no matter how tempted we are. I am afraid that the amendment threatens to do that.

11.30 am

I should like to make a more important and, I hope, more persuasive point. We must pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), who spotted very early one of the great weaknesses in the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968. No provision was made for an escalation of penalties. There was either a total penalty or none. The hon. Gentleman persuaded me very early that that matter would be one of the key factors in amending the Act. That is why the legislation, as amended, provides for the escalation of penalties, starting with an

[Mr. Forth]

admonition, increasing to a monetary penalty of £1,000 and going on—this is the key point—to talk about suspensions and, ultimately, removal from the register.

That fully meets the points made by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle and for Devizes (Mr. Morrison). No matter how large or powerful a company may be, suspension or erasure from the register will impose a much greater penalty than any fine that the legislation imposes.

I hope that I can persuade the House to do as the Standing Committee saw fit to do—not to be tempted by the arguments to impose higher levels of penalty but to look again at the escalation of penalties provided in Standing Committee through the hon. Member for Ynys Môn. I strongly recommend that the House reject the amendment if it is pressed to a Vote. The Government are unable to support it.

Mr. Leigh: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), I do not think that the House, which is anxious that the Bill should be passed, wants a Division at this stage, but I am not entirely satisfied with the reply of my hon. Friend the Minister. He referred to suspension, as he did in Standing Committee, but that is not a practical proposition in many cases and is unlikely to occur.

My hon. Friend the Minister spoke also of the need for balance. In Committee he said:

"I have taken the advice of the legal authorities and of the Home Office. The proposals would cause problems . . . making an offence triable upon indictment."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 5 April 1989; c.7.]

My hon. Friend did not make that point today. I should have liked him to tell us more about the legal advice that he received. I am not convinced that a penalty of £3,000 would cause problems with the Lord Chancellor's Department, but I am prepared to accept that my hon. Friend receives legal advice of a far higher standard than is available to me. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

11.33 am

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I have listened intently to the debate on Report, and I am pleased that the Bill can be commended to the House for Third Reading. When I was fortunate enough to win the ballot some time ago, little did I think that I would be moving the Third Reading. Hon. Members who have been successful in private Members' ballots are inundated with requests from all manner of worthy causes to present Bills to the House, but I was determined from an early stage to present a measure that would assist the hard of hearing, especially the elderly.

One of the first acts after ensuring that I had a measure worthy of support was to make sure that that support came from all parties. I must place on record my grateful thanks to all those who have supported my Bill, including the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), and especially the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). I should like to thank also the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who has been extremely supportive, and the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), who is not in her place. Those names show the wide support for the Bill.

It struck me as remarkable that one in 10 people suffer from some form of hearing loss. The proportion among elderly people is one in four. Hearing loss leads to tremendous social isolation, a matter that is little understood. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South who has done tremendous work and has raised the profile of this issue. That we can discuss the Bill on Third reading is due in great measure to his efforts.

Eighty per cent. of those people who acquire hearing aids do so through the National Health Service, but a significant proportion—20 per cent.—get their hearing aids from the private sector, the sector with which the Bill deals. About 650 private hearing aid dispensers are registered with the Hearing Aid Council and we are complaining about the activities of only a small number of them.

I have received almost 300 letters from people during the Bill's passage complaining about the activities of a small group of dispensers. Out of all the complaints, 84 per cent. refer to six companies; 66 per cent. to three companies; and, even more startling, nearly 40 per cent. to one company. The complaints show that only a small number of companies are involved, but they cause distress to hundreds of elderly people.

Mr. Colvin: I genuinely do not know the answer to this point. How many complaints must be made before a company is struck off the register? How many companies have been struck off the register since the council came into being?

Mr. Jones: My information is that only one company has been struck off the register in the past 20 years or so. I do not think that the council would tot up the number of complaints before it struck off a company. It would consider the nature and seriousness of a complaint.

What complaints do we need to address? A small number of companies are using high sales pressure techniques and coupon advertising to get at vulnerable elderly people. Many of us have seen coupon advertisements in popular newspapers inviting people with hearing loss to respond and making tremendous claims for their products. Because the industry has dominated the council for so long, the code of practice is weak.

When sending literature to someone who has responded to an advertisement, a hearing aid dispenser is entitled to tell him, "We shall call and visit you to discuss your request unless you tell us that you do not want us to come." That is a weakness in the current code of practice. Inevitably, when someone asks for more information, a salesman will call, and he will often deploy all the high-pressure techniques at his disposal. The people affected are elderly, vulnerable and socially isolated who have been preyed upon by a number of dispensers and their sales people.

Unfortunately, as we have heard today, it takes time to adapt to a hearing aid. A hearing aid is not like spectacles, whose suitability can be judged immediately, according to whether one can see through them. Experts tell me that it takes up to a month or even longer to adjust to the sound

that comes out of a hearing aid and to pick up the differences in sound. Moreover, one has to adapt to wearing a hearing aid. When it first arrives, one cannot wear it for very long at a time; one must get used to it. By the time someone discovers that a hearing aid is not suitable, the salesman may be long gone and impossible to trace. The complaints mechanism that we have now is wholly inappropriate.

To illustrate my case, let me describe two of the 300 complaints that I received. An elderly couple were visited by a salesman who told them that a particular model was appropriate. They did not have any cash in the house, but the salesman persuaded them to go to the bank with him to withdraw the cash and to hand it over there and then.

Perhaps even more significant was the case of the elderly lady who had looked after her parents all her life. She had suffered a hearing loss and was socially isolated, having been unable to make friends because she was looking after her parents. Her parents left her a small sum, and she decided that she would like a hearing aid. That hearing aid accounted for all the money that she had been left. She then found that it was inappropriate. She had spent all her money on it, thinking that she could go out into the community and socialise more because she would be able to hear. That poor woman was preyed upon by the dispensers and their sales person and she had no redress. There are many other cases like that, and the Bill is designed to address them.

The Bill is a modest measure—private Members' Bills are, by their very nature, modest measures—but it is important because, under the 1968 Act, the council can deal only with matters of serious misconduct, and the only sanction that it has is to strike a dispenser off the register. The council is reluctant to use that simple sanction because it deprives a dispenser of his or her livelihood. As we have heard, it has been used on only one occasion.

We need, therefore, to increase the range of disciplinary offences that the council can deal with. Unfortunately, the highly legalistic way in which complaints are dealt with at present is very expensive for the council. That is no criticism of the promoter of the 1968 Bill, which was a ten-minute Bill. It is remarkable that Laurie Pavitt managed to get a ten-minute Bill on to the statute book; it is difficult enough when one succeeds in the ballot.

The Bill seeks to make a breach of the code of practice a disciplinary offence and it includes a range of penalties that the council can employ. We also make it clear in the Bill that, if a dispenser is found guilty, he can be ordered to pay the costs of a hearing, which is borne by the council at present.

Most significant is the change in the composition of the council, which goes to the heart of the matter. For years, complaints have gone unnoticed by the council because it is dominated by the industry. The council should include more consumer representation; the consumer's voice must be heard so that complaints can be dealt with more effectively and efficiently, enabling us to root out the small group of companies that have caused so much distress.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): The hon. Gentleman has said that the Bill is aimed at a small group of companies. Are the companies large enough easily to afford to pay a fine of £3,000 or perhaps even £20,000?

Mr. Jones: That is a good point, although the hon. Gentleman has put me in a dilemma because I should have preferred a higher monetary penalty. But if we changed the amount of the penalty for a disciplinary offence, which is £1,000, we should also have to change the penalty for the criminal offence that is committed by a person who is unregistered, which is also £1,000. To maintain a balance, we must accept, unfortunately, that the figure must be kept at £1,000. I agree that the companies could well afford to pay a higher fine, but we must remember that there are other sanctions such as suspension and erasure and that more than one penalty can be imposed under the Bill. That overcomes some of the concerns that have been expressed about the level of penalty.

I thank the Minister for his positive response to the Bill. He has been supportive and constructive, and he has listened, although there are many points on which we have failed to agree. I hope that the Bill will have the wholehearted support of the House.

11.48 am

Mr. Barry Porter: I note that I did not figure in the plethora of thanks of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), and I was not altogether surprised. I again declare my interest as an adviser to the trade association that acts on behalf of the dispensers.

Millions of hearing aids have been dispensed by the private sector since the Hearing Act Council was set up, and the promoter of the Bill has been entirely fair in pointing out that, in this big trade, the number of complaints and the number of companies involved in those complaints has been very small. I re-emphasise that. The trade has made a distinct and positive contribution to helping the hard of hearing. In that regard, I pray in aid what the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) said in Committee. He, too, said that an enormous contribution was made by the private sector and that it was largely beneficial.

Mr. Colvin: I followed this morning's debate closely. The manufacturers are clearly under attack. Would it not assist everyone concerned if there were a stamp of approval? I have followed up two advertisements in the national press during the past fortnight. I have received brochures from the manufacturers and I searched them to see whether in the literature there was anything to say, "This organisation is approved by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf" or "We have the full approval of the Hearing Aid Council". Something similar to a British standards stamp would assure people that the hearing aid which they are buying has been tested, approved and is a legitimate product.

Mr. Porter: I have some sympathy with that view. Those whom I advise would be willing to discuss any such suggestion sympathetically if there are no practical contrary considerations. I cannot think of any at the moment.

It occurred to me this morning that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn has tried to graft on to an Act about trade regulation provisions to turn it into a consumer protection Act. I am not sure whether the graft will take. I am gratified to note that the Minister said that a fundamental review of the National Health Service in general and of provision for the deaf and hard of hearing is going on. Perhaps the appropriate time to discuss such matters in

[Mr. Porter]

detail will be in a year or so when, presumably, the Government's proposals will come forward. I hope that that is the case.

I do not blame the hon. Member for Ynys Môn for the graft. I level that accusation against my hon. Friend the Minister. His fertile imagination produced the new 4 : 4 : 4 composition of the Hearing Aid Council. It is a matter of opinion, but the promoter of the Bill would have been happy with one additional consumer to balance the council at 6 : 6. After some thought, and reservations having been expressed, those whom I advise were willing to accept that composition.

The Minister has made his decision, and the Standing Committee followed it without too much difficulty. As the Bill leaves the House, one guess, that the composition will be 4 : 4 : 4. It would be remiss of me not to point out one or two difficulties that will arise as a result of that.

Consumers have been nominated traditionally—indeed by necessity—from organisations whose membership primarily involves National Health Service hearing aid users. I refer to the British Association of the Hard of Hearing, Age Concern and other organisations. People who buy hearing aids privately are not members of associations. it would be extremely difficult to find consumer nominations which were likely to have a balanced view of the national and private health sectors. One can advance that argument further in relation to medical nominations. It is obvious that virtually all medical and paramedical employees in this country are either directly or indirectly associated with the NHS.

It follows that medical nominees would also have a leaning towards the National Health Service and, as a side effect, a leaning towards the consumer element. On the newly constituted council.

There is a fear, which is justified to an extent, that the composition will not be 4:4:4 and that there will be eight consumers and four people from the industry. The industry considers that that is out of balance. It would have been much happier with the original suggestion by the promoter of the Bill. It is feared that there will also be difficulty in finding sufficient consumers to meet the appropriate requirement.

I am told—this is a matter of some detail with which I will not bore the House, as I sense that the House wants to dispose of this matter fairly soon—that there will be difficulties in manning subcommittees and with people being on disciplinary and technical committees. The industry seems to think that it would be difficult to find people of the appropriate calibre. It fears that the new composition will be biased against the private sector. I hope that the Minister will try to alleviate those worries.

The problem of funding has already been mentioned. The council was a trade regulatory body. Although the trade had the majority of members on the council, it was content with, if not happy about, funding it. In 1987, its expenditure was £33,000, and in 1988 it was £73,000. They are not enormous sums of money, but they are not inconsiderable. With the balance of power on the council being so fundamentally changed, is it right that the trade should be expected to fund it completely?

Oftel, a consumer organisation which was set up by the Government to protect consumers against the predatory habits of British Telecom, is funded by the taxpayer. What is the difference between Oftel and the Hearing Aid council? It has been suggested that there is an element of taxation without representation. That is probably going a bit overboard. Why on earth should the industry be expected to fund something which the House had determined should be set up for the benefit of the consumer and taxpayer? The matter cannot be lightly brushed aside. My hon. Friend the Minister should exercise his fertile imagination a little more.

Mr. Riddick: My hon. Friend mentioned Oftel. Consumers should pay for the protection which Oftel provides for them. No doubt British Telecom would provide the majority of income in that case. British Telecom's income comes from its customers. An important principle is at stake, and it could easily be applied to the hearing aid industry.

Mr. Porter: I listened to my hon. Friend's intervention with great interest. I assume that he supports what I am saying, but I am not entirely certain.

Mr. Riddick: I did not support what my hon. Friend said. I suggested that consumers should pay for the protection which is being provided through the industry. Obviously the industry gets its income from consumers. I was putting the opposite view.

Mr. Porter: I do not agree, but I am obliged to my hon. Friend. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will take that view into account when he makes up his mind about my points on funding.

The trade has some reservations about the Bill. I hope that when we next discuss the matter a Minister from the Department of Health will be present. Today's debate is not entirely relevant to trade. However, it is the only vehicle that we have.

I thank the promoter of the Bill for the courtesy which he has shown me in our discussions on the Bill over the past weeks. The Hearing Aid Association has been grateful for the way in which he has approached the matter. He has not castigated or made false or exaggerated attacks on the industry which has done much positive and beneficial work. Although I have some mild criticism of the Minister, I thank him for the consultation procedure, particularly in respect of council nominations. I hope that the Bill will have the effect which the hon. Member for Ynys Môn wishes. We want those people who are a slur on the industry to be weeded out. I hope that my reservations about the composition of the council will be taken in the spirit in which they were delivered.

Mr. Ashley: I thank the sponsor of the Bill the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) and congratulate him on getting the Bill through to Third Reading. He has been both diplomatic and determined. I have been struck by his skills in conducting the Bill through the House, through Committee and here on Third Reading. He has been magnificent and I offer him my warmest congratulations.

The original Bill was drawn up by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf some months ago and I had pleasure in presenting it on behalf of the institute. It worked very hard on the Bill. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) was kind enough to mention that I am president of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and it is in that capacity that I offer my congratulations to

the sponsor and express appreciation to everyone who has been involved in the Bill. The RNID is grateful for their work.

I should like to add my warmest thanks to Miss Rosalind Oakley, who has worked hard on the Bill. She has briefed hon. Members on both sides of the House and has ensured that we know all the arguments. The hearing aid dispensers have ensured that hon. Members know their views, and I appreciate the work of Miss Oakley. I am grateful, too, for the work of Mr. John Healey.

It has been said in the House that the Government will give the Bill a fair wind. The Minister has given it more than a fair wind; his support has given it a stiff breeze, for which I am glad.

I am also the chairman of the all-party disablement group; that group, too, warmly supports the Bill.

Laurie Pavitt rendered a great service to disabled people by putting through the original Bill, because in those days there was not the same understanding of the problems of deaf people. Laurie Pavitt did a phenomenal job in getting that Bill on to the statute book. I am sorry that he is not here to see the passage of this Bill, which has been built upon his original Bill.

The essence of the Bill is that it tackles the scandal of the exploitation of deaf people by shifty salesmen using high-pressure sales techniques. Deaf people are often harrassed, especially older people, with unsolicited visits by salesmen and by unscrupulous advertising. Some of the advertisements are an absolute disgrace because they are so grossly misleading. My blood has boiled when I have seen them. Efforts have been made to curtail them, but without succes. However, they will now be curtailed by the Bill.

What makes me angry about such dispensers is that they have made deaf people feel ashamed of deafness. The awful thing is that those advertisements have implied that deafness is something to hide and of which to be ashamed. Dispensers have done that on the pretext of helping deaf people, which is a prime example of double-talking, double-dealing and double-crossing.

As the promoter of the Bill and the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) have pointed out, it is only a small group of dispensers who do such things. The vast majority do a good job. I am glad to repeat that point, which I made in Committee. However, that small group causes serious distress to deaf people. Those dispensers have also blackened the name of the hearing aid industry.

The main provisions of the Bill extend the range of complaints that can be investigated and the range of sanctions available. Those are important advances. However, the crucial provision is the ending of the domination of the hearing aid council by the hearing aid industry. It was absolutely absurd that the hearing aid industry should have been able to dominate that council. It has now a voice, but a minority voice, which is right.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): One important aspect that has not been mentioned, apart from the rogue salesmen and the way in which they extort money from people for their unsatisfactory hearing aids, is the complete failure to offer any after-sales servicing. That is an important aspect of the problem that has not been aired enough.

Mr. Ashley: The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. In fact, it was raised before the hon. Gentleman came into the Chamber by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes). I am sure that he was very busy elsewhere. I am glad that the point about the failure of after-sales service has been emphasised.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn mentioned his concern about the new balance of the council—four from the trade, four consumers and four medical or technical experts. He expressed the anxiety that there may not be many people qualified for the task and there may be difficulty in finding them. I do not for one moment believe that those doubts and anxieties are justified. I believe that there will be no problem in finding the proper people.

I emphasise again to the Minister that it is important that those he chooses are truly independent. It is important that they are not stooges of the industry. It is important that they are truly independent, with an expertise in and knowledge of deafness or a knowledge of the problems involved. I know that I can trust him to do that. I hope that his successors, too, will take on board the fact that that independence is crucial.

The Bill will be of enormous help to all those people who buy hearing aids privately. As the hon. Member for Ynys Môn has said, that is 20 per cent. of users. I hope that, in future, the admirable advances made by the Bill will be supplemented by improvements in the provision of hearing aids by the National Health Service and that it will have more resources, more choice and better aids. I hope that we can pursue that campaign of helping the National Health Service with the skill and determination that has been shown by hon. Members on all sides of the House in getting the Bill through its various stages.

12.9 pm

Mr. Summerson: As the promoter said, this is a Bill to assist the hard of hearing and especially the elderly hard of hearing. I congratulate him on presenting it. I have some personal interest in this matter because I suffer from tinnitus and deafness in one ear. Even when I speak, I can hear the whining hum in my left ear, which is always with me. It is a matter of concern that, as I grow older, it may, of course, become worse. Although I am not elderly just yet, it is a good thing to look ahead to the time when I will be elderly and perhaps will benefit from the provisions of the Bill.

I had my first brush with a doorstep salesman at the age of about 16, when I foolishly filled in one of those coupons in a newspaper. I was at school at the time and the next thing that happened was that a man arrived in a Ford van, range the bell of my housemaster's house and asked for me. He was sent away with a flea in his ear. I was summoned to the housemaster's study and I, too, was given a flea in my ear. Ever since that tender age, I have been extremely wary about filling in such coupons in case I should find such a man arriving at my front doorstep. I know from my constituents that such visits take place. They find them especially distressing as, in many cases, they cannot understand what the salesman is saying. I am sure that some of those unscrupulous salesmen play on that.

I have already mentioned small advertisements. I believe that they do not appear in the most reputable of newspapers—if any newspaper today can be said to be reputable. The fact that such advertisements are parodied in *Private Eye* makes one realise how far the level of such advertisements have sunk.

[Mr. Summerson]

If one was ever confronted with the horrific choice of which of one's senses one could least do without, I am sure that loss of hearing would be considered the worst. I am musical and I know that many great composers, Beethoven and Smetana among them, suffered from deafness. Smetana wrote a string quartet in which the first violin played a long whining note which signified to him the first sounds of tinnitus—the first sign of the onset of deafness.

To be cut off from the world by deafness must be one of the worst possible things, especially for the elderly. Other hon. Members have already said how isolated such people feel. They feel they cannot go out; what is worse, they fear that they may be made fun of. What a terrible thing that must be. A deaf person may have the suspicion that he is being made fun of, but, of course, he cannot make out what is being said: he just has that feeling.

Other hon. Members have covered most of the points that I wanted to raise, but I think that it is a bit strange that the Department of Health is not the responsible Ministry for hearing aids. I am casting no aspersions on my hon. Friend the Minister, but it is rather odd. I know that this matter was raised in Committee, but I do not believe that anything has been done about it. I am sure that the Minister feels that he is on probation, and we look to him for an excellent performance.

Some elderly deaf people manage to make light of their disability by joking at themselves. I have an elderly deaf relative who, some years ago, gave a dinner party. During a lull in the conversation someone turned to her to get the ball rolling again and said, "Isn't it awful all these young men being killed in Vietnam?" Without a second's hesitation she replied, "Yes, but I believe they recover if you water them after dark." She had the great knack of being able to laugh at herself and if people can do that it is a way of getting over their disability. It is okay to do that when one is among friends, but the knock on the door heralding the unfriendly salesman is another matter. His only intention is to make another sale—that is all he is bothered about. He does not care that the ear is one of the most delicate organs. What on earth can a salesman know about whether his particular product is right for any particular person?

I hope that the Bill will be something that can be dropped on the toe of the salesman who has got his foot in the door. I hope that we can drive out those salesmen, to the benefit of the elderly hard of hearing.

12.13 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): As a sponsor of the Bill, I wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) not only on promoting the Bill, but on getting it through the House successfully. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is a modest measure and obviously our debate has touched on things that are outside the scope of that Bill, but that is not surprising.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) should consider that as there is agreement on all sides that abuse by a relatively small number of companies is causing hardship, it would be to the industry's great advantage to have the Bill in place. The Bill will weed out the problem, and if standards are conspicuously improved deaf people will feel more confident to take advantage of the technologies and developments available in the private sector. To that extent, I am surprised that there has been some resistance to a Bill which I believe is highly desirable.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) has just given anecdotal evidence of the type of problems that occur. Many people have become so wary as a result of stories about unscrupulous salespeople that they have prevented themselves from getting useful advice because they do not want to expose themselves to a situation in which advantage could be taken of them. I hope that the Bill will help to reduce that problem to the great advantage of deaf people and of the industry.

In common with other hon. Members I have a particular interest in the deaf as my daughter is profoundly deaf. She is 12 years old and goes to Aberdeen school for the deaf. As a result of that, I have become involved with the National Deaf Children's Society and I am president of its local area branch. Although many of the speeches today have related to people who have gone deaf in later life, I wish to consider those unfortunate enough to be born profoundly deaf and start at a substantial disadvantage which they have to carry through life. The Bill has an important contribution to make to their lives.

As the hon. Member for Walthamstow has said, losing one's hearing is bad enough, but to have no hearing in the first place means that it is extremely difficult to get a basic grasp of language, through which we interact with other human beings. It is extremely difficult to learn the language and if one does not know or cannot hear the language, it is that much harder to speak and to lip read. Thankfully, relatively few people are born profoundly deaf. Such people are socially detached and anything that the House can do at any time to improve their ability to interact with their hearing peers is welcome. The Bill is a step forward.

The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), whose son is deaf, pointed out that those of us who have deaf children have, in general, nothing but praise for the service that we receive from the NHS, although we may have questions about the technology, which is constantly changing and which is not so good as we would like. There are still problems with moulds that do not fit and the consequent deterioration in the operation of a hearing aid and problems with diagnosing the scale of the problem in an individual.

I accept that it is all very well to suggest that there should be a Hearing Aid Council standard or safeguard to show that a particular hearing aid is approved, but that does not deal with the problem. That hearing aid may not be appropriate. Someone may go to the private sector and contract to buy a hearing aid. There may be nothing wrong with it—it may be perfectly manufactured and of a technically high standard—but it may not be appropriate for that individual. I believe that dispensing is just as important as the technology of the hearing aid. We must ensure that dispensing standards are improved.

At the age of 18 my daughter will no longer be provided for totally by the Health Service. She will have to be prepared to contract for her own hearing aids. We all acknowledge that the private sector is advancing the technology of hearing aids faster than the Health Service on cosmetic grounds, and so on. If one is profoundly deaf one will want to get hold of technology which may be available outside of the Health Service. There must be absolute confidence that people will receive fair, detached and objective advice and the right after-sales service and

correction if the complaint is wrongly diagnosed. The Bill makes a contribution towards resolving that problem and will be welcome.

I hope that the House appreciates that while we all know that the Bill is directed at the millions of people who become deaf and that, a small step forward has been made to protect their interests, it is important to acknowledge the smaller number of people who are born profoundly deaf, who have never had the advantage of being able to hear and who should be adequately protected. More could be done by the House, but I very much welcome the Bill.

12.21 pm

Mr. Colvin: I wish to associate myself with the generous and well-deserved words of thanks and praise which have been spoken today, particularly to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and its president the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), and, finally, to Mr. Laurie Pavitt who initiated the matter. As I have said, it is important in today's debate to put down markers for the other place. I say that in hopeful anticipation of the Bill receiving a successful Third Reading today. I wish to make five points in that connection.

First, my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) complained that the membership of the council was too loaded in favour of consumers with eight members representing consumers and only four representing the hearing aid industry. I should have preferred the council to be weighted even more heavily with five members from deaf organisations, one from a consumer organisation, four medical experts on deafness and four from the hearing aid industry. That would give a better balance of 10 against four with an independent chairman and ensure that people who use deaf aids were properly represented.

Next, my hon. Friend also made the point about the disciplinary committee, which should also be heavily weighted in favour of those who use hearing aids. I should like the number of industry representatives on the disciplinary committee to be restricted to one, with two representatives from deaf organisations, one from a consumer organisation and an independent chairman. That would ensure that the members of the council who represented hearing aid users had a majority on the disciplinary committee of five members. That is important.

The other place might also consider adding to the Bill a provision to give the council general powers to appoint additional committees. At the moment, the only committee that exists is the disciplinary committee. Under the Opticians Act 1958, opticians have a general power to appoint any committees they wish, and there is already an education committee and a companies committee. Such committees could have autonomy and could be directly responsible, not necessarily to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but perhaps to the Secretary of State for Health. That could be immensely valuable.

Another factor omitted from the Bill, no doubt by an oversight, is that there was no provision in the 1968 Act to require the council to produce an annual report. The other place should consider an amendment to compel the council to show each year how effectively and actively it has protected the interests of hearing aid consumers. The provision should require the council to state the number of occasions on which the disciplinary committee has been convened. On past experience, according to the RNID, it has been convened in 11 of the 20 years since the council was established, which is not very many.

Finally there should be an obligation on the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a report on the overall effectiveness of the council in protecting the interests of hearing aid users, on the availability of hearing aids to the public and on the potential for transferring adult hearing aid services from hospitals to health services or group practices and dispensing hearing aids by a community dispenser, which is what the RNID proposes in its document, "Hearing Aids: The Case For Change."

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn on bringing forward the Bill. I hope that it will have a fair passage in the other place, to the eternal help of the 3·9 million deaf people in this country.

12.27 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): This is an important measure and I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), both on his luck in the ballot for private Members' Bills and his choice of Bill. Few people win a high enough place in the ballot to legislate so soon after entering the House and the hon. Member has used his good fortune to excellent purpose. I congratulate him also on the content and manner of his presentation of the Bill. Both upstairs in Committee on 5 April and here on the Floor of the House today he has made the case for his Bill with eloquence and obvious sincerity.

At the same time, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), I recall today the pioneering work of our former parliamentary colleague Laurie Pavitt in piloting the parent Act—the Hearing Aid Council Act—to the statute book in 1968. His work for hearing-impaired people will long be remembered, on both sides of both Houses of Parliament, with respect and appreciation. Speaking for the Opposition, I most warmly welcome this strengthening of his legislation and, from this Front Bench, pledge our full support for the early translation of the Bill into law.

The Bill's main purpose, by amending and strengthening the Hearing Aid Council Act, is to protect some of the most vulnerable among Britain's 3.9 million adults—including one in every two people over the age of 70—with a hearing loss serious enough to warrant the use of a hearing aid. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys undertook a definitive survey on the prevalence of disability, commissioned by the Government and published last September, showing that hearing impairment is the second most common disability in Britain today. Successful fitting and use of hearing aids reduces and can remove this disability, which is why the provision of the right aid at the right time is so important to so many people.

The National Health Service is, of course, the main provider of hearing aids but, as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn said, some 20 per cent. of all aids dispensed in this country are bought privately. They are often bought by elderly people who have been subjected to utterly disreputable sales techniques. There are cases of people spending as much as £2,000 on useless aids.

Let me give the House one example of the abuse with which this Bill is intended to deal. I give the example because it illustrates so well the importance of the Bill and

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

has been so fully and clearly documented. It concerns an elderly woman living alone whose hearing deteriorated to the point at which she felt unable to mix with other people. Her doctor arranged an appointment with a specialist at Hull royal infirmary, where she was told that she would have to wait 15 months for an NHS hearing aid. She writes:

"In sheer desperation I decided to go to Amplivox-Ultratone for a hearing test. I was told they had a hearing aid costing £375 to suit my particular kind of deafness and that it would be ready in a week. I had been widowed six months and was going on holiday to try to cheer myself up, so I thought that if it took all my savings I must have one."

She had to take the hearing aid back as it was of no help whatever to her and was then told that she needed two hearing aids. Her letter goes on:

"I said I had no more money and was then told that I could have a second aid, with wires round my neck and into my right ear, at a cost of another £100."

This elderly widow then went back to her GP, who arranged a further NHS appointment with a specialist for her. The specialist made it quite clear that she had been grossly misled and exploited by the private dispenser. She then took her case to the small claims court and eventually had her money returned to her, plus costs. The case was virtually undefended and her letter concludes:

"If I had not had to wait 15 months for an NHS aid, I would have been spared all this worry and distress."

This case sets in bold relief the compelling need for this Bill. As was pointed out at the Committee stage by my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, the accounts of hearing aid companies show them to be highly profitable. In the year ending May 1987, for example, Ultratone Limited had an annual turnover of £11·5 million, with net profits after tax of more than £500,000. So as an example of the strong exploiting the weak, the Hull case takes some beating. The case also strongly emphasises the way in which long delays in providing aids under the National Health Service pile handicap on handicap for people whose disability may be unseen but is nevertheless a daunting burden to bear.

Ministers do not, of course, talk freely about contract prices for purchases by the NHS. But as the Minister who announced and carried into effect the replacement of the old body-worn NHS hearing aid by the behind-the-ear model, I must take the opportunity of this debate to say that some of the private sector's prices for hearing aids, which are certainly no better than the NHS aid, are totally outrageous. They are not just an affront to human decency but a serious crime against disabled people who, in some cases among the more elderly, go to the private sector for fear that they may die in the queue for NHS provision.

My decision, as the then Minister for the Disabled, to phase out the body-worn aid formerly issued by the NHS, was taken in the mid-1970s. It was seen by the hearing impaired as a major advance. The new aid was cosmetically very much better than its predecessor and cosmetics can be very important to disabled people: ask those, for example, who use wheelchairs about the importance of having some chrome. But the change that I carried through from the old body-worn hearing aid was a very long time ago. What are the present Government prepared to do, nearly 15 years on, to carry that reform further? Has the Minister any statement to make about this today?

In his handling of this Bill, the Under-Secretary seems to have almost ruined his reputation as a would-be parliamentary tough guy: the Humphrey Bogart, as it were, of the House of Commons. Some of his interventions in Standing Committee read more like Sir Humphrey than "Bogie". He has clearly been helpful in regard to this Bill, as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn has acknowledged, both on and behind the scenes. He has won praise for being frank and fair in debate on a Bill which is rightly interventionist in its approach to tackling abuse in the private sector, and also more regulatory in its effects.

This House is often at its best when discussing the problems and needs of people with disabilities. Yet all of us must regard it as unfortunate that, once again, it has taken a private Member's Bill to achieve much needed help for disabled people. It is simply not good enough that legislative progress in a field of such importance has to rely, time and time again, on the luck and dedication of Back Benchers in this House. The Government have a responsibility to match their rhetoric about the needs of disabled people with more legislation of their own, especially when effective protection of vulnerable consumers is the issue.

The Government also have a clear duty to improve NHS provision at a time when the Chancellor is awash with public funds. In a recent Adjournment debate initiated by the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), the Minister, in reply, spoke of a review that the Department of Health has been undertaking in this field. He said:

"In the coming months we must work on a sensible set of reforms, which commend themselves to all those who work in the Health Service and, above all, meet patient needs."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. 1303.]

Is there anything more the Under-Secretary can say about that review today? He must know that there is cause for concern when so many patients feel driven to the private sector and when there is the depth of exploitation which I and other right hon. and hon. Members have exemplified to the House? Has he read Dinah Hall's interview with Lord Snowdon in *The Times* of 16 February 1989? That interview reflects anger with the treatment of disabled people by unscrupulous high-pressure salesmen. Lord Snowdon, than whom no one has done more to help the victims of their techniques, said in the interview:

"I have no objection to companies making profits on something that is not needed—luxuries for able-bodied people. But when it's cashing in on people with disabilities . . ."

Has the Under-Secretary seen the reply I had last Friday from the Minister for Health about the training of hearing therapists and the development of standards-based vocational qualifications? He presumably knows that proposals have been made to the Care Sector Consortium and the Training Agency on which the British Society of Hearing Therapists has been invited to comment? The reply was one of particular interest to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and the British Association of the Hard of Hearing and it will be helpful to the RNID, to BAHOH and to the House if there is anything the Under-Secretary can add to it in this debate. I shall be grateful for any further information we can have —I assume that the Minister has had some consultation with the Department of Health—about the Government's intentions in regard to improvements in provision for the vast majority of hearing-impaired people who have to rely on the NHS for help.

The Hearing Aid Council is poorly equipped to discipline dispensers. Thus its record of disciplinary action is also poor. As the House has heard, the council's disciplinary committee has met just five times since 1976 and, in 12 years, struck off only one dispenser. Again as the House knows, in the 21 years of its existence the committee has met only 12 times and has struck off only seven dispensers. This contrasts with the thousands of complaints sent to right hon. and hon. Members, not least to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn since he announced his intention of introducing the Bill. They are almost all about gross overcharging of mainly elderly disabled people and the now wholly inadequate means of redress. The Act is not working and is much strengthened by this important Bill which, not before time, will improve the ability of the Hearing Aid Council to discipline the dispensers who are guilty of abuse.

In Committee the hon. Member for Ynys Môn said that there were some outstanding points of difficulty about the Government's approach to the Bill

". . .where we remain on opposite banks of the river".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 5 April 1989; c.30.]

I hope very much that, when this Bill reaches the statute book, with any improvements that the House of Lords may be able to suggest, we shall all, on both sides of Parliament, Front Bench and Back Bench alike, find ourselves on the same river bank, out of respect for the very wide range of organisations that support the Bill and for that part of the private sector that welcomes the protection the Bill offers to elderly and disabled people. Again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn. I thank the Minister, as the hon. Member did, for his helpfulness in Committee and pledge again total support from these Benches for the speedy passage and quick implementation of this Bill.

12.40 pm

Mr. Forth: I shall again be brief, not only because today truly belongs to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), whose Bill this is, but also because I sense that the House is anxious to get to the next item of business. Quite rightly, everybody has expressed the extent to which hon. Members and people with hearing impediments are indebted to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn for what he has been able to do. It is not often that a private Member's Bill can achieve what has been achieved. I sincerely hope that the House will shortly agree to give the Bill a Third Reading. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn can rightly feel pleased about what he has achieved.

I thank the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) for his kind words about me and I link those thanks with thanks to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I doubt whether my career will survive in view of what has been said about me in the debate, but I shall do my best to make sure that, where appropriate, we continue to use measures such as this to give protection or encouragement to those who need it. That is not inconsistent with adopting a robust attitude to those who are well able to look after themselves. That might go some way towards explaining the paradox that has puzzled many hon. Members during the debate.

The Bill does many important things and we have highlighted two of them. One is the matter of penalties. We think that we have put in place a workable series of penalties that will go a long way towards giving the council effective powers to deal with appropriate matters.

On the question of composition, my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) made a helpful and positive contribution. He has knowledge of and interest in this matter, and rightly expressed concern on behalf of the industry and the dispensers about the nature of the new composition that the Bill will bring to the council. May I seek to reassure my hon. Friend by saying that we shall now have to find a way of having a membership of the council that reflects the nature of the industry? We shall do everything that we can to ensure representation from users of private sector products. I accept his comment that it is right that that should be so, and we shall try to do it when requesting nominations for membership of the council and by looking carefully at such nominations. The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South also spoke about that matter, and I hope that we shall be able to meet his requirements.

There is concern about funding which I well understand. At no point does the Bill set out to alter the basis of funding; it does not seek to be the vehicle to do that. I understand the concerns of the industry, but perhaps the House will be reassured to know that the main costs incurred by the council are in disciplinary proceedings. We amended the Bill to provide that the amounts levied by fines should go to the council and therefore in large measure offset any costs that may be incurred. We hope that that will also meet any additional costs that may be incurred through additional proceedings of the kind envisaged by many hon. Members.

We have gone some way towards providing a compensatory factor, if I may put it that way. I remind the House that the Secretary of State has to agree the annual fees levied by the council. Therefore, there is a safety valve, and if things ever threaten to get out of hand or to be dealt with irresponsibly—although I do not envisage that—there is a safety net. I hope that that reassures the industry and the dispensers. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South for his positive attitude and hope that he will pass my comments to the dispensers so that from now on everyone will be able to make the council a more effective and more workable body.

The House can be pleased with the work it has done this morning. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn must be delighted. I ask the House to give the Bill a resounding Third Reading and send it well on its way to the other place so that it may reach the statute book as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Control of Pollution (Amendment) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

12.46 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill comes to its Third Reading substantially amended in Committee. As I indicated on Second Reading, we had experienced some difficulties in drafting what was then part II of the Bill and what is now clause 6 dealing with powers to seize vehicles used in illegal waste disposal. I hoped that we could positively improve the drafting but my fear, which was rather more acute than my hope, was that we might lose that part of the Bill altogether due to opposition within Government Departments. However, my resolve to introduce these new powers was greatly strengthened by the comments of hon. Members on Second Reading when, as those who were present will recall, hon. Members called for even more severe measures —for example, confiscation of vehicles—than I had proposed.

During the intervening months, we have been able to consult in depth on my proposals, and I am delighted to be able to report the very positive results of those discussions. I am extremely grateful, first, to the London Waste Regulation Authority. Its members have given me unwavering support and its officers have spent an inordinate amount of time advising me and consulting departmental officials. Secondly, I am extremely grateful for the support of the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) who, in the course of our negotiations, was able to set aside the reservations that she expressed on Second Reading, enabling us to spend a most productive time improving the Bill in Committee without diminishing any of its original intentions.

I remind the House of the problem that the Bill seeks to address. Waste production from all sources has dramatically increased in Britain in recent decades. As the quantity, complexity and hazardous nature of wastes has grown, so has the disposal problem. In short, disposal of waste has become big business and, in turn, the potential profit has attracted a criminal element seeking to evade the current law on control of pollution and dump loads illegally.

My concern about the activities of fly tippers, as they are popularly known, began with representations from tenants on the Silwood estate in my constituency, through which I discovered not only the extent of the problem in my own constituency but the difficulties for the enforcing authorities in trying to tackle that very problem. I discovered that more than 10,000 tons of waste had been deposited near that housing estate, which led me to have more discussions both with my own local authority—Lewisham borough council—and the London Waste Regulation Authority. I discovered that the problem was widespread. I received reports from hon. Members of fly tipping not just in the conurbation but in rural areas, including some of our most cherished natural beauty spots. Clearly, the dimensions of the problem of illegal waste disposal are such as to require rather more than the Prime Ministerial exhortation to bag it and bin it.

In London—an area of 600 square miles with a population of 7 million people—about 17 million tons of waste is generated each year, 3·25 million tons of which is household waste and civic amenity waste, which is handled primarily by the public sector. A total of 13·75 million tonnes, however, is commercial and industrial waste handled by the private sector. In the greater London area there are approximately 300,000 industrial and commercial waste producers which generate a great variety of waste ranging from small quantities of complex chemicals to thousands of tonnes of material, some of which is extremely hazardous.

In London the regulation of waste disposal is the responsibility of the London Waste Regulation Authority and the London boroughs. In recent years,the LWRA has given considerable priority to the fight against illegal disposal of waste. However, as it stated in its annual report for 1987-88, that is a very difficult task. With regard to the need to undertake surveillance of popular fly tipping areas —particularly the more notorious sites, some of which are in the borough of Lewisham—the LWRA stated:

"Such exercises, to be effective, needed a good many officers and placed a strain on the LWRA's limited resources. LWRA officers, in common with most other enforcement agencies, have no special powers of arrest and are instructed to avoid dangerous situations. Some fly tippers can be extremely violent. On one occasion an offender drove his lorry at an officer's car. On another, an officer was assaulted by a site operator and savaged by the man's guard dog. As it stands at present, the law is so convoluted as to make it extremely difficult to mount successful prosecutions against fly tippers. An offender needs to be apprehended while actually committing the offence and it is necessary to prove that the waste that is deposited is controlled waste as defined by the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Witnesses, who are often ordinary members of the public, have not always been willing to appear in court. These are just two of the many problems to be surmounted. Procedural difficulties mean that the task of bringing an offender to book is a time consuming and uphill task."

That is why, as hon. Members will appreciate, it was necessary for me to introduce this private Members' Bill.

The powers that the Bill would grant are twofold. First, it establishes a registration scheme whereby those who undertake the removal of controlled waste for commercial reasons must obtain a registration certificate from the waste disposal authority. Failure to do that before moving controlled waste will be an offence. That measure will undoubtedly reduce the number of cowboy operators and it will be positively welcomed by the many legitimate operators who feel that they have been given a bad name in the business by the criminal elements.

Secondly, the Bill provides for the seizure of vehicles where the authority has reasonable grounds for believing that the vehicle has been used for the illegal disposal of waste and an offence has been committed, but it has been impossible for the authority to trace the responsible person. I hasten to add that it will not be possible for the authority to take such dramatic measures as seizure without having obtained a warrant from the appropriate authority.

I wish briefly to clarify several points outstanding from the Standing Committe stage about the operation of the Bill and to put on record the advice that I have received. There was concern about the phrase:

"or otherwise with a view to profit."

It is clear to hon. Members that a firm which is commercially engaged in these matters involves a company which regularly takes money for transporting waste. However, there was concern about what the phrase would cover. The object in this part of the Bill is to catch everyone

whom one could reasonably describe as a waste carrier. We are not after the individual householder, as I explained on Second Reading. However, we might wish to encompass carriers who are not seen to be in the business of waste disposal but who may casually accept a cash payment for carrying in a vehicle and disposing of someone else's waste. The vehicle might not even be a lorry. Such informal cash-down arrangements would arguably not constitute a waste disposal business but, if uncontrolled, could give rise to fly tipping. Accordingly, our belt and braces definition is justified. Our definition includes all businesses carrying waste and any person carrying waste with a view to profiting from that activity. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members wish to see that provision in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) was concerned that partnerships might be vulnerable to de-registration every time they lose or acquire new partners. After close examination of that aspect, we believe that that will not be a real problem. There are four possible cases to consider. When a new partner joins an existing partnership which is registered, he must apply for and secure registration before becoming a partner. That is a reasonable requirement, and one that he would have to fulfil if he were setting up as a waste carrier on is own account. When an existing partner leaves a partnership, there is no effect on the partnership's registration, and when an existing partner's registration is revoked a period of grace is allowed before revocation takes effect so that the carrier may appeal. During that period of grace, the partnership may decide either that the partner should appeal or that he should cease to be a partner—either of which will preserve the other partners' registration. When a partner voluntarily surrenders his registration but remains in the partnership—this would be peculiarly perverse—it would still be open to the other partners to remove him from the partnership so as to preserve their registration. I am satisfied, on the basis of that technical advice, that the Bill does not grossly inconvenience partners or partnerships but protects the right of society to ensure that those who engage in business through partnerships cannot use that legal form of business to evade the law.

Concern was expressed by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that the definition of "road" in respect of an amendment to the Bill citing the Road Traffic Act 1988 is too narrow. Again, I believe that such a fear is unjustified. The only parts of the Bill in which the word "road" appears are clauses 5(2) and new clause 3, which provide that no one other than a police constable in uniform may stop a vehicle on any road. However, off the road a disposal authority officer also may stop a vehicle. In effect, the narrower the definition of "road", the wider the power of authority officers. I know that that provision is important to waste regulation authorities, who often have to give chase to cowboy operators and only stop them well away from the public highway. Those new powers will do much to strengthen the hand of the enforcement authorities and to give hope to many constituents of mine and of other right hon. and hon. Members whose environment has for so long been blighted by the menace of fly tipping.

I introduce one note of caution. The Bill as amended is more dependent on regulation to be brought forward by the Minister than was originally the case. When the Minister responds, I ask her to make clear to the House the timescale against which those regulations will be brought forward. We do not want to place positive legislation on the statute book, only to find that it is inoperable or only partially operable due to lack of Government regulation.

Once again, I thank the sponsors, all of whom wished us well even though they had other engagements and could not be with us today. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley). I also express my sincere thanks to those who have given me such helpful legal and technical advice—the London Waste Regulation Authority, the London borough of Lewisham and my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran). Again, I must express my satisfaction at the unusual accord that has been reached on both sides of the House in relation to this private Member's Bill. I was gratified to find only yesterday a reference to my Bill in the Government's reply to the second report of the Environment Select Committee on toxic waste. It has been a privilege to bring a new green Bill thus far in the House. I hope that hon. Members will consent to its Third Reading.

1.1 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): On Second Reading of the Bill, on which the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) was kind enough to invite me to join her as co-sponsor, I congratulated her on her good fortune in the ballot, which we all envy, and even more on her choice of subject, which concerns a severe aspect of environmental pollution. I express my congratulations on the skill and flexibility with which the hon. Lady has piloted the Bill to this final stage in the House. That is not the easiest thing for a Back Bencher to do.

The hon. Lady was right in congratulating, and drawing attention to the part played by, the London Waste Regulation Authority. Councillor Mrs. Joan Wykes and Mr. Ferguson, the general manager, gave impressive evidence to the Environment Select Committee on the problems covered by the Bill. I think that the hon. Lady will not mind my saying that, in a sense, this is also their Bill.

I thank also my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. Because of her good will and that of her officials and the assistance that they have given the hon. Member for Deptford, it is possible for us to give the Bill a Third Reading in the knowledge that the House will not divide on it. The hon. Lady will therefore have the satisfaction of having a Bill in her name.

The Bill started life with the limited but vital objective of eliminating that pernicious phenomenon of our commercial life, fly tipping. It now completes its life in the House as a Bill for the registration of carriers of waste. Perhaps, on reflection, that suggests a more appropriate title for the Bill—Registration of Carriers of Waste Bill—because it more readily identifies than the previous title what the legislation is about.

The Bill is a necessary link in the chain of duty of care which is the strategy that the Department of the Environment is evolving to deal with the problems associated with waste disposal. The fact that controlled waste will be transportable only by registered carriers will make it much easier to trace back to the original producers waste subjected to improper disposal.

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

This goes far wider than fly tipping. In that connection it is important to emphasise that the term used in the Bill, "controlled waste", includes ordinary builders' rubble. When using such technical terms the subject may appear to have greater importance and significance than it has. Builders' rubble is the biggest part of fly tipping. That will carry a penalty of up to £2,000 under the Bill—for the unregistered carrier who carries controlled waste. If the rubble contains asbestos or other dangerous substances, an even higher penalty—a penalty without limit—can apply to the unregistered carrier.

I welcome the fact that in clause 6 we have found a way to provide machinery for the seizure of vehicles used by unregistered carriers of controlled waste. It is very limited —more limited than I should have liked—as a magistrate's warrant will be required before the seizure can take place, and as the vehicle can be stopped only by a constable in uniform. We can understand the reservations that the Home Office may have about a system under which all the current waste disposal authorities—the county authorities and the metropolitan boroughs—had officials who had been given the power to stop and seize vehicles. It is a pity, then, that the regulation authorities as proposed by the Select Committee on the Environment, on the excellent model of the London Waste Regulation Authority, have not been accepted by the Department of the Environment. If we had a limited number of waste authorities organised on a regional basis, it would be far easier to control a system under which non-police officers had the power to stop vehicles and the circumstances in which they could detain them. That weakness in clause 6 may make it difficult to use effectively.

Ms. Ruddock: I sympathise with that argument, as I have shared the hon. Gentleman's concern. I was pleased to learn, however, that the London Waste Regulation Authority, which was closely involved in amending the Bill, felt that it would be able to operate the clause. It often needs the protection of the police, and it felt that the clause would be adequate.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I am certain that it is better to have clause 6 in its present form than to have nothing at all. The fact that vehicles can be seized is an important sanction in itself. Waste regulatory authorities might, in future, find the system more cumbersome than they would like if they have to find a magistrate at home and provide all the evidence to obtain a warrant, particularly in regard to the carrier who may be very difficult to identify.

Another matter that needs to be emphasised is that the use of registered carriers will only in part discharge the duty of care as I understand the Government intend it to apply. Producers will also have to have regard to the competence of carriers in relation to the waste that they are contracting to carry to discharge the duty of care. The question then arises whether in the regulations made under the Bill there should be some reference to competence—whether there should be a prescription for a certificate of competence on the part of the carrier.

It may be argued that the Department of Transport carriage of dangerous goods regulations provide control. Is my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment satisfied that there is provision under those regulations for the training that would be, and should be, required for people who carry waste materials to enable them to understand the nature of the waste that they are carrying, how it should be dealt with and what to do should there be an accident? With this Bill, we are going beyond builders' rubble and contemplating every other kind of waste that falls within the definition of controlled waste.

The final problem is the identification of fly tippers who might be registered or, more likely, unregistered. The offence under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 is to deposit material. To prosecute, one must either catch the fly tipper red-handed or have sufficient means of identifying him by the vehicle that he used. In the present circumstances, that requires eye-witnesses with pretty good eyesight, especially when a lorry's registration number is accidentally covered in mud, dirt or some other material that obscures its easy identification.

For that reason, following the thoughts of the Royal Commission on the environment in its eleventh report, the Select Committee suggested to the Government that there should be clear, positive identification on vehicles for hire or use by carriers of waste. The Government accepted the Royal Commission's recommendation as long ago as 1986, and then embarked on a period of consultation, as a result of which they have withdrawn from the Royal Commission's suggestion that there should be some kind of identification plate on a vehicle registered for the carriage of waste. Again, one can see the difficulty of a plate being easily seen and identified.

For that reason, the Select Committee went further and said that a registered carrier should have his name and address clearly emblazoned on his vehicle so that an eye-witness to fly tipping could readily identify and report without the confusion that frequently arises from half reading a number plate on the front or back of a vehicle. Unhappily, the Government have not agreed to that suggestion. I hope that, in the light of experience, they will have second thoughts. Perhaps they can deal with the matter in the regulations which they will be entitled to make when the Bill becomes an Act.

There are practical problems. A carrier may hire a vehicle to do a job for somebody else. We might need some changes in current practices. After all, if the Government are to introduce a duty of care, that in itself will require considerable changes in the way in which the industry presently gets rid of its unwanted rubbish. Therefore, it is not too far-fetched to provide a regime whereby controlled waste of all kinds should be carried in registered vehicles which are clearly marked as such, and marked in such a way that they can be readily identified by an eye-witness even on a dark winter's night in an obscure lay-by.

I hope that the Government will have further thoughts on that matter. The debate does not end on Third Reading in the House. The Bill must go to another place, and then we shall consider the regulations. It is always easy to find a dozen reasons for saying no. What one is interested in is finding the will to do something that is necessary. I suggest to the Minister, and to those advising her, that the Select Committee has not put forward its recommendations idly. They followed detailed examination of evidence from all sources. We realise that our recommendations are not easy to implement, but the need is such that a way should be found to do that.

I leave these thoughts with my hon. Friend the

Minister. I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford once again and hope that she has the pleasure of seeing on the statute book a Bill in her name.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on being successful in bringing her Bill to this stage. Tribute has been paid by the Chairman of the Select Committee and others to the hon. Lady's efforts to take advice, to discuss the way forward and to bring to Third Reading a Bill that is appreciated and supported by all who take the question of waste and waste control seriously.

Fly tipping is a costly and offensive scourge which blights many parts of our country, especially some inner-city areas. There is no doubt that the Bill will make a useful contribution in refining the weapons to deal with that great problem. I appreciate the time and trouble that the hon. Lady has taken over the details and I am pleased that during Committee stage we were able significantly to alter the Bill in various key areas.

The Bill has, of course, been strengthened in Committee. Two examples are that, first, waste authorities can now use powers to search a vehicle, to make tests and to take samples of the loads, and, secondly, we have added a new offence of obstructing an officer who is stopping and seizing a vehicle. The Bill, in its amended form, will do two important things. It will create an effective register of waste carriers. The register will be of great use to authorities in their enforcement work and also to producers of waste who are seeing a legitimate outlet. All this is designed to be as simple as possible to impose the least burden on local authorities and legitimate industry while protecting those who are clearly deeply concerned about fly tipping.

The Bill will create a new enforcement power for authorities to seize vehicles. On Second Reading, the whole House recognised the strength of feeling that a measure was required which would provide for the seizing of a vehicle where a fly tipping offence had occurred but the owner of the vehicle had not been identified. I am pleased that we have been able to develop that into a form which is acceptable and will, I believe, be effective. The Bill is essentially an aid to detection rather than a new form of punishment. We cannot enact a power to confiscate vehicles as a punishment wherever there exists a suspicion against the driver. Hon. Members must agree that punishment is a matter for the courts and should be imposed only on those who have been properly tried and found guilty. Confiscating a vehicle is a serious matter because the vehicle is a form of livelihood. Those who have seen vehicles fly tipping sometimes forget that wrongfully to seize a vehicle would create severe difficulties for the owner if his purpose had been innocent.

There are a number of areas in which we have decided to bring forward regulations. The advantage of regulations is that further time is given to consult. It is easy to legislate hastily without, perhaps, thinking through the implications of the regulations for the people involved. In recent weeks it has been clear that the London Waste Regulation Authority and others have been able to help to refine the Bill. We hope that the time taken to produce the regulations will be used constructively. In Committee I said that we hoped to bring forward those regulations by the end of the year. There is no doubt that my Department takes this matter extremely seriously. We are also involved in a number of other measures to try to improve our control of waste and a great deal of effort and energy will be invested in that.

Our proposals to introduce a duty of care on the producers of waste, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) referred, will be the key to dealing with waste which is left in the wrong place. We shall have an important weapon with which to tackle that problem through our ability to identify the source of the waste and make the person involved responsible. To introduce those regulations we need a register of carriers of waste so that those who have a legitimate wish to continue their business feel secure that the people to whom they have entrusted their waste will satisfactorily meet the necessary standards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green was also concerned about visible identification on the vehicle to show that it was licensed to carry waste. We discussed this in some detail in Committee. Although we agreed that, superficially, such a visual registration would be a good idea, there would be a number of exceptions where a carrier would not need to be registered—for example, if he was carrying his own waste. We must also consider the effects of such a concept on small businesses which sometimes hire or borrow an additional vehicle while carrying out a respectable trade. We therefore believe that the registration of such carriers and the obligation on them to produce the document to prove their registration is the right way forward. There is no short cut or substitute for stopping a vehicle and checking on the registration. We are not convinced that a visible plaque is the right way forward, but there will be a further opportunity to discuss all these matters because the Government have made it clear that they want to bring forward comprehensive proposals for waste legislation at the earliest opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green also asked about the competence of those carrying particular waste. Although the Government have made it clear that they believe that competence should be a material consideration when issuing a licence for waste disposal sites, there are no proposals for competence to be a particular requirement for registration. Registration will mean that there is a list of those carrying out a legimate trade. We shall, of course, consider those matters carefully when we issue the draft regulations and my hon. Friend may wish to make additional points at that stage.

My hon. Friend also asked about the need for a constable to be present when stopping a vehicle on the highway, and that need is recognised. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford and the London Waste Regulation Authority have made it clear that many of the characters involved in the illegal business of fly tipping are not those whom many would want to approach on a dark night without the presence of a constable. We believe that that requirement is right and proper. A member of the London Waste Regulation Authority is, of course, entitled to approach a vehicle off the main road and to ask to see that the vehicle is registered. We believe that we have got the balance right and that the requirement will be enforceable and add to the other measures that we have in mind.

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

It is clear that as society progresses we generate ever increasing amounts of waste, whether it be domestic waste, builders' rubble, industrial waste or fairly hazardous waste. The Government are determined to update at the earliest opportunity their proposals for dealing with waste in a comprehensive and thorough fashion. They have brought forward a series of discussion papers and documents in recent years and are anxious to take all views into account when finalising the details for legislation.

There is no doubt that the Bill brought forward by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford will make a significant and important contribution. Not only her constituents, but all those affected by fly tipping and all those involved in the legitimate trade of waste disposal have every reason to be grateful to her. I hope that the House will give the hon. Lady's Bill a robust and resounding Third Reading and that it will successfully continue on its way to another place.

1.26 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): With regard to this piece of legislation, I say to my hon. Friend the Minister, "Regulations, regulations and more regulations". Our party is supposed to be the party which, recognising that we are over-regulated in our businesses and industries, has made a special point of trying to remove regulations and to limit the number of new regulations put on the statute book.

I have taken a great interest in small businesses all my political life. The Bill will undoubtedly have a major effect on such businesses, which have small lorries to carry waste from one place to another. There are many small businesses in the building industry. My father was a demolition contractor and I have lifelong experience of travelling to and from waste tips to get rid of rubbish, so I know a great deal about the subject. There are many waste tips in my constituency, which is part of the Thames estuary. It houses many old gravel sites and one of the largest waste disposal contractors in the country, Corys, which has one of the most advanced plants for dealing with and disposing of toxic waste.

I do not speak merely to be controversial but because I believe there are a great many errors in the idea behind the Bill. No one wants rubbish to be dumped in a field, in someone's backyard or wherever. Everyone believes that people who do that should be caught and severely punished. However, there is a great difference between that and new regulations requiring special licences for vehicles which merely carry a bit of builders' rubbish from one place to another. People with lorries already have to obtain heavy goods vehicle licences, and one virtually needs a degree in law to understand the relevant regulations. I am not exaggerating when I stress the degree of pressure that this places on lorry owners who do a good job of taking rubbish sites to proper waste tips.

We also make it difficult for people to open sites where waste can be disposed. Again, I speak from experience. When one of the obviously suitable gravel pits in my constituency is offered for tipping, enormous numbers of people always protest. Those who live nearby do not want lorries travelling down the lanes and do not like the idea of having rubbish nearby although they all help to generate it. Protests are always made and we end up with fewer and fewer sites on which people can honestly and legitimately dump rubbish. We make it difficult for them to do so. This is the other side of environmentalists' problem. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) shakes her head, but a large part of my constituency business consists of people complaining either about taking waste to sites or about waste disposal.

If those who produce chemical waste were monitored —we know which firms make noxious or toxic industrial chemicals—we could ensure at that point that the waste would be properly disposed of. We could come to grips with the issue. However, making life more difficult for people who have to obtain special licences for their vehicles is unduly interventionist.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. She is well known for speaking on behalf of small businesses, and the whole House much appreciates her efforts on their behalf. Would she be satisfied if we said that when we come to make regulations we shall appreciate her advice as to their effect on the people for whom she is concerned, who are involved in a legitimate trade but who may not have all the authority of large firms behind them?

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister, and I am grateful for her suggestion. Since I appear to be in a bargaining position, before imposing these over-onerous regulations will she consider the development of more sites for legitimate tipping and obliging people who produce toxic waste to register, so that we know who is producing the rubbish? That would be better than giving powers to coppers to stop every lorry travelling from A to B with a bit of old rubbish, and making lorry drivers take out licences or be looked on as potential criminals.

Mrs. Bottomley: It is well known that the Government hope to bring forward comprehensive legislation on waste at the earliest opportunity. We would much appreciate the thoughts and comments of my hon. Friend. There is no doubt that she will have many more opportunities to develop her important points at much greater length.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend. I hope that what I have extracted from her does not turn out to be waste, and I hope that she will not fly tip my ideas.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill

Considered in Committee.

Clause 1

PERSONS AUTHORISED TO PASS AND STAMP EQUIPMENT

1.32 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I beg to move amendment No. 66, in page 1, line 5, leave out 'Secretary of State', and insert

'local weights and measures authority for the area in which an applicant for a licence has his head office or his registered office'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 37, in page 1, line 5, after 'State' insert

', after consultation with any local weights and measures authority appearing to him to be concerned,'.

No. 29, in page 1, leave out lines 7 to 9 and insert—

(aa) is employed by a local weights and measures authority and has completed a course of training deemed by the Secretary of State to be satisfactory.'.

No. 48, in page 1, line 9, leave out from 'applies' to end of line 11.

No. 73, in page 1, leave out lines 10 and 11 and insert——

(b) satisfies regulations issued from time to time Secretary of State in consultation with representatives of local weights and measures authorities and

(ba) who has been accredited and audited in accordance with BS 5750 on such other quality assurance scheme as the Secretary of State may from time to time determine, and

(bb) has been accredited by the National Weights and Measures Laboratory in conjunction with Local Trading Standards inspectors and

(bc) has been audited by the appropriate local authority inspector in conjunction with the National Weights and Measures Laboratory.'.

No. 39, in page 1, line 10, after 'satisfies', insert

'the Secretary of State as to the matters mentioned in subsection (1A) below and complies with'.

No. 67, in page 1, line 10, leave out 'Secretary of State' and insert

'local weights and measures authority'.

No. 47, in page 1, line 12, leave out from 'section' to 'equipment' in line 14.

No. 49, in page 1, line 14, leave out from 'applies' to end of line 15.

No. 40, in page 1, line 15, at end insert—

'(1A) The matters referred to in subsection (1)(b) above are—

(a) the adequacy of the quality assurance system which is to be adopted by the applicant;

(b) the adequancy of the procedures which are to be so adopted for ensuring that any equipment which is passed and stamped by the applicant conforms to or complies with such of the following as are applicable to it, namely—

(i) any pattern in respect of which a certificate of approval under section 12 of the 1985 Act is in force; and

(ii) the requirements of regulations under section 15 of that Act (including in particular the requirement that the equipment should fall within the prescribed limits of error); and

(c) the traceability to national measurement standards of any testing equipment which is to be used by the applicant.'

No. 68, in page 1, line 17, leave out 'Secretary of State' and insert 'local weights and measures authority'.

No. 22, in page 1, line 17, at end insert—

'(2A) Before granting a licence, the Secretary of State shall consult the Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures for the local weights and measures authority, and the authority, together with the Chief Inspectors of such other local weights and measures authorities (if any) as appear to him to be appropriate.'.

No. 69, in page 1, line 20, leave out 'Secretary of State' and insert

'local weights and measures authority'.

No. 72, in page 1, line 23, leave out

'Secretary of State such fee as the Secretary of State'

and insert

'local weights and measures authority such fee as the authority.'.

Mr. Illsley: The Opposition are concerned that this measure has been introduced through the private Member's Bill procedure. We are aware of the Eden report on this subject of a few years ago, and of the Government's response to it. In effect, the Government accept most of the committee's recommendations. We should have liked the Government to introduce a comprehensive measure dealing with the self-verification of weights and measures equipment. We believe that this Bill deals only with a section of the Eden committee's recommendations and does not implement them comprehensively.

Amendment No. 66 seeks to delete the word "Secretary of State" and to insert the words

"local weights and measures authority".

The amendment goes to the heart of the Bill. We think that the appropriate authorities to deal with weights and measures inspection and verification should be local weights and measures authorities and trading standards officers. Which, therefore, is the appropriate body to grant licences under clause 1?

There are a number of reasons why I should like the local weights and measures authorities to be the licensing authorities rather than vesting that power with the Secretary of State. The latter course would involve a centralised system of weights and measures administration with powers placed on the Secretary of State and would move us away from the local aspect of weights and measures administration. It is a fact that every local authority has a department that deals with weights and measures legislation and contains trading standards officers. The localisation of weights and measures administration should be retained.

In any event, if the Secretary of State were the licensing authority, he would have to seek the advice and co-operation of a host of other organisations on the applications for licences that he would receive. As it is more than likely that those organisations would be local weights and measures authorities together with organisations such as the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, we feel that the involvement of the local weights and measures authorities should be retained.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend satisfied that there has been sufficient consultation with the weights and measures authorities? All hon. Members who have been involved with consumer affairs legislation in the House for a long time are worried that there may not have been sufficient consultation. Does

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

my hon. Friend agree that such consultation is important in determining our attitude to the amendment and to the Government's control of the Bill as a whole?

Mr. Ilsley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important point. It might have been better if the promoter of the Bill, the Government, the local weights and measures authorities and their representatives had been brought together to discuss a comprehensive Bill on which all parties could agree because, although there is a substantial measure of agreement within the local weights and measures authorities on the recommendations of the Eden committee, there is not a great deal of agreement about the provisions of the Bill which seeks to enact only part of the recommendations of that committee. I am sure that the local weights and measures authorities would be only too pleased to participate with the Department of Trade and Industry and with the manufacturers of weights and measures equipment in drawing up some proposals for a framework for legislation on this matter.

Centralising the power to grant licences in the Secretary of State would mean that he would either utilise the framework and the facilities that are already available—the local weights and measures authorities—or adopt an attitude of granting blanket licences to any manufacturer who applies. That would defeat the whole object of weights and measures legislation. I stress that we can trace the origins of such legislation as far back as the Magna Carta.

Although we talk about safeguards in weights and measures legislation, it would seem to defeat the whole idea of protecting the public from being short measured if we were to give a power to the Secretary of State, without adequate safeguards, to give a blanket licence to anyone making an application.

I emphasise that the local weights and measure authorities have considerable experience in that area, and I suggest that they should be responsible for the granting of those licences. Indeed, by their very name, the local weights and measures authorities are the obvious candidates to run any type of licensing arrangements. They are doing the job now and they are doing it well. The public have confidence in them. That confidence is increasing, and that is borne out by the response that most local trading standards officers receive to their reports.

Trading standards officers have influence within their authority areas. Why should we remove from them the whole remit for weights and measures administration and pass it to the Secretary of State? Those officers are doing the job and would be the obvious people to grant licences. If the power to grant licences is left with the Secretary of State, he will have to utilise weights and measures officers and trading standards officers or employ trained staff. It would be ridiculous if local weights and measures officers were not used by the Secretary of State. Why not give them the job and the authority to grant the licences to be applied for by various manufacturers?

Local weights and measures authorities have been operating for years and have built up local knowledge of companies, operators and people who use weights and measures equipment. Such local knowledge will be essential for the Secretary of State before he grants a licence. Again it seems logical that the ideal candidate to supply that local experience and knowledge is the local weights and measures authority. That would also enable local weights and measures authorities to combine inspection with other aspects of trading standards in their locality. The assessment about the suitability of a company for a licence could be combined with the normal day-to-day workings of local departments, and that would save time, effort and money. Local weights and measures departments have instant knowledge about the suitability of candidates applying for licences.

The Bill requires the provision of various controls such as audit and accreditation mechanisms. It also requires the inspection of the verification systems that will be put in place for manufacturers. Once again it will be left to local trading standards officers to control and monitor the audit and accreditation systems that will have to be used by manufacturers. It would be a duplication of effort to bring in local weights and measures officers under part of their remit to advise the Secretary of State when he is considering licence applications. The authorities should be given the power to carry out that job at the same time as they are verifying audit control, quality control and accreditation systems.

The job of considering the suitability of an applicant for a licence will enable the local authority to accumulate knowledge and experience of manufacturers in its area. That experience can be used to make instant decisions about licences and that will cut down on the bureaucracy of shuffling papers between local authorities and the Secretary of State. The local weights and measures authority is on the spot and has the experience, the knowledge and the capability to carry out the necessary functions in a short time. Of course it could also do the job much cheaper.

As well as being able to grant licences, the local weights and measures authority could also be an adviser. Before or after a licence application the authority could advise manufacturers on how to set up a self-verification and accreditation system or a quality control system. During that process of giving advice or advising on these systems, the local weights and measures authority would be able to accumulate the information required for the granting of a licence. Indeed, it would be on the spot to advise a company about what measures it would need to employ to qualify for a licence offered under the terms of this Bill rather than applications being made through the system to the Secretary of State, with a licence possibly being refused and further amendments being required. In those circumstances, much bureaucratic effort is involved in the granting of a licence.

1.45 pm

The Eden committee said in its report that any scheme of self-verification must engender the same confidence as verification by weights and measures inspectors. If we are to maintain public confidence in the weights and measures system in this country, licensing should be left with the local authorities and not given to the Secretary of State.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would seem to be more sensible for the Government to act on all the recommendations of the Eden committee by bringing forward its own Bill? Why has it taken the Government so long to act, and why are we having now to deal with a partial implementation of the

Eden recommendations through a private Member's Bill rather than deal with a comprehensive Government measure which would have appeal to all parties concerned?

Mr. Illsley: We would obviously have liked and would have co-operated in consultation on the full implementation of the Eden committee proposals, or as near to that as could be achieved. The Eden committee reported in June 1985, the Government's response being completed a year later. So the Government have had three years in which to bring forward a comprehensive Bill to cover these aspects of the weights and measures legislation. Even at this late stage, we would still like to see the Bill withdrawn with some commitment to a Government Bill and consultation with all the appropriate authorities.

I was saying that public confidence has to be maintained in the weights and measures authorities and legislation. As that public confidence presently rests with local weights and measures authorities, if the provision before us is accepted, that confidence will be transferred to the granting of licences.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that much of the good work of the local weights and measures authorities would be destroyed if we had a central licensing system? Another great danger is that many local authorities now have inter-departmental arrangements between one area and another, enabling information to be transmitted very quickly to put on warning other areas of the country against fraud or other criminal acts. That, too, could be at risk.

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend demonstrates adequately another reason why local weights and measures authorities have a stake in being the licensing authority under the Bill. Through their knowledge, networking and the facility they offer, authorities are able to work together. Their extensive knowledge in the field is what presses us to move these amendments to include them as the licensing authority.

The Eden committee recommended independent assessment, accreditation and surveillance. If amendment No. 66 is accepted, we would be moving some way towards the Eden committee recommendations. Paragraph 117 of the Eden report states that the authorities should be responsible to the Secretary of State and should also be publicly accountable. It stated that they should establish and publish criteria for accreditation and assess, accredit and register manufacturers. It also recommended that they should maintain a register and have many other responsibilities. Eden produced a long list of recommendations which he believed were necessary for the authority which would deal with the legislation. I believe that Eden never envisaged the idea that the Secretary of State would be the sole licensing authority. He believed that weights and measures authorities would be given that role.

Eden recommended that the authorities should be responsible to the Secretary of State through some kind of mechanism.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): One of my worries about the Bill is that it gives the Secretary of State powers to fiddle. That is roughly it. The manufacturers are saying that they do not want an independent body to test their machines. They want the power to make them, repair them, and to fix the dials. That is in line with this Government's policies. They have fiddled 19 different sets of unemployment figures, they have fiddled the cost of living figures, and they have threatened to fiddle the balance of payments deficit because it is so embarrassing. Now along comes this Bill from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin). The Government are so blatant that they are introducing Bills under the guise of private Members' Bills to fiddle the figures. That just shows how arrogant the Government have become.

Only a few days ago the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare could have introduced his Bill, but what happened? He fiddled it away. It disappeared from view and was scheduled for another Friday. Then some Government fiddler came along to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare and jogged his elbow. He said, "Get your Bill off. Fiddle it away." He fiddled it away. He sat in this place for an hour and a half and then decided to take it off at the Government's behest. The whole thing is surrounded by fiddling. It fits in with the Government's performance in trying to trick and deceive the nation.

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend has made one or two points in his brief intervention which I should like to address.

The fact that the Bill is being presented as a private Member's Bill does not exactly inspire confidence in the hope that the Government will protect weights and measures legislation. Public confidence would have been maintained had we had a Government Bill open to the full rigours of debate, with a Committee stage and consultation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): I am at a bit of a loss to understand the difference in principle between the private Member's Bill on the very important subject of fly tipping and waste control and this measure. Surely it is equally legitimate for Members on both sides of the House to come forward with such measures.

Mr. Illsley: I am not seeking to deny Members the right to bring forward Bills on whatever subject they choose. That point is for another debate at another time.

Weights and measures legislation and weights and measures authorities must maintain public confidence. In such a delicate area as this, perhaps a Government Bill involving adequate consultation, taking into account the Eden committee's recommendations in full, would have been more suitable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) also referred to tolerance exploitation, and that will be raised later in our proceedings.

Paragraph 124 of the report sets out three scenarios for a self-verification system. They include the British Standards Institution, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory and the National Metrication Coordinating Unit. All three scenarios are set out diagrammatically and are explained in some detail, but not one of them takes recourse to the Secretary of State as the highest authority. A supervisory body exists in all three cases, but at no point is it ultimately or immediately responsible to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Bermingham: Earlier, my hon. Friend mentioned public confidence in the Government. One cannot have confidence in a Government when, as in the case of the factories inspectorate, the number of public inspectors has decreased, as has also occurred in respect of Admiralty searches and the number of marine surveyors. If weights and measures also passed into private hands, what

[Mr. Bermingham]

guarantee would their be that proper verification would take place—and that verification or self-verification of the small repairer will be adequate to guarantee the accuracy of weights and measures systems?

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend's comments are self-explanatory. Public confidence must be maintained in any weights and measures legislation, as must the current local accountability.

Amendments Nos. 48 and 73 relate to provisions that we feel should be included in the Bill for regulating licences. We propose four different conditions, because the regulations set out in clause 1 relating to matters that must be taken into account by the Secretary of State when considering licence applications are inadequate, and they should be substantially strengthened.

Licence conditions and regulations should be clearly defined, and those relating to any self-verification scheme must be particularly well understood. The Bill currently requires only that a licence application should be in writing, accompanied by a fee, and that a record of it should be kept. Provided that a manufacturer can write and can afford the fee, he can obtain a licence. The Bill imposes no further conditions as to the suitability or otherwise of any manufacturer or body applying for a licence under the Bill.

Weights and measures legislation is a technical area, as is evidenced by the Weights and Measures Act 1985, and we are concerned that the Bill is loosely drafted. Licence conditions should be clearly stipulated, but the Bill contains only a vague proviso mentioning certain requirements of the Secretary of State—not conditions, but only requirements. We believe that licence applications should comply with various conditions. The first is that the applicant satisfies regulations to be issued from time to time by the Secretary of State in consultation with local weights and measures authorities. We believe that they are the appropriate authorities to draw up regulations in conjunction with the Government in ensuring that weights and measures legislation retains public confidence.

2 pm

Under the second condition, schemes must be accredited and audited in accordance with BS5750, which deals with quality aassurance schemes, or other quality assurance systems which the Secretary of State may introduce. The third condition provides for the National Weights and Measures Laboratory and local authority trading standards officers to accredit licensees. The fourth condition provides for assistance by the NWML in auditing manufacturers.

There must be confidence in any self-verification scheme introduced under licence or the Bill, and that would involve local weights and measures inspectors. There should be independent assessment of quality management systems, accreditation systems and surveillance systems. Paragraph 16 of the Eden report sets out self-verification schemes in detail. The committee recommended that BS5750 should be followed in quality assurance schemes. We believe that that should be made compulsory in the Bill. The government accepted that proposal in their response to the committee's report.

The Eden committee set out requirements for authorities administering the scheme. Those requirements should be included in the Bill to make it comprehensive. The Bill refers merely to a vague request to comply with requirements.

Mr. Bermingham: Is not the great danger of the Bill the fact that, because it is so short on detail, it is wide in the licence that it gives manufacturers? There cannot be quality control when licence is given to abuse.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I hope that we shall return to that issue. Applications for a licence should lay down detailed requirements for manufacturers or, as my hon. Friends have said, the Bill will be a charter for manufacturers to cheat.

The paragraphs in amendment No. 73 reflect the Eden committee's recommendations. The committee envisaged a split system for self-verification schemes, a split between the supervisory role, covering regulations issued by the Secretary of State and accreditation by the NWML and trading standards officers, and the Executive, which would have the job of inspecting the schemes, accrediting those involved and auditing management on a day-to-day basis. The British Standards Institution, because of BS5750 on quality management schemes, would be a prime candidate on the supervisory side, with the NWML and trading standards inspectors carrying out field audits. Alternatively, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory and the National Metrological Co-ordinating Unit might act as supervisors, with the weights and measures laboratory accrediting the firms and manufacturers and the home trading standards officers carrying out audits and imposing sanctions.

The final suggestion involved the establishment of an accreditation board——

Mr. Skinner: Something has just crossed my mind. My hon. Friend has been associated with the mining industry all his life. He may care to draw attention to something that happened when I was a lot younger and when his father worked down the pit. We used to have self-verification machines at the pit, owned by the private coal owners, who weighed their own coal. Under the Bill, those weighing machines could come back. We should then have to do what we did then and employ a check weighman to check the bosses' weighing machines. The bosses ran the tubs of coal over the weighing machines and cheated the miners. We had to pay check weighmen out of our own pockets to stop them doing it.

We have talked about a return to the Victorian era. The Bill might not take us quite as far back as that, but the system extended into the twenties and thirties and right up to nationalisation. The miners had to employ people to check the machines, which were deliberately made to cheat them out of the amount that they were due for the coal that they had produced.

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend has given us a graphic description of the introduction of the check weighman into the coal industry. What he has described is known as tolerance exploitation. Within a given legal tolerance, a weighing machine can be adjusted to give a lesser reading than that which it is prescribed to deliver. Tolerance exploitation is still possible under the law, and one of our fears about the Bill is that tolerance exploitation may be used by repairers or installers—rather than the

manufacturers, with whom the clause deals—especially those who have some relationship with the end user of the machine. We hope to come to that in due course.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does my hon. Friend know that, in a statute of 1335, Edward I made it clear that it was precisely such problems that concerned him? He required that, in the weighing of wool,

"the Tongue of the Balance be even, without bowing to one Side or the other, and without Hand or Foot, or other Touch made thereto."

Is it not clear that nothing changes?

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend is right that nothing changes. As I said earlier, the weights and measures legislation can be traced back to that statute and to the Magna Carta.

Mr. Bermingham: To Roman times.

Mr. Illsley: As my hon. Friend says, it goes back to Roman times. The Bill would severely dent public confidence in weights and measures, which hitherto has enjoyed a high degree of continuity.

A cost would have to be involved—a licensing fee—if, for example, the British Standards Institution were involved, as it would have to cover its costs. The accreditation boards, too, would have to cover their members' expenses. Under the existing arrangements, it is sensible to include and use the existing organisations such as the weights and measures laboratory and the co-ordinating unit. That would make the transition to the new system easier and ensure that we were using known, tried and tested standards.

All the recommendations to which I referred and which are contained in the amendment are set out in paragraph 126 of the Eden report. The Eden committee's recommendation was accepted by the Government, but it was not put into the Bill, and we have no Government legislation to implement it. It is interesting to consider the Government's response. The Eden committee recommended:

"Accreditation to self-verify will depend on the applicant satisfying the Secretary of State about:

(a) quality assurance;

(b) the traceability of testing equipment to national measurement standards;

(c) the procedures for ensuring conformity with an approved pattern;

(d) the adequacy of the testing regime for ensuring that self-verified equipment meets the relevant regulations."

On page 11 of the Government's response, one line stands out and confirms what I have been saying. It reads:

"there is a special opportunity to benefit from inspectors' accumulated experience in the verification of equipment".

Unfortunately, that does not appear in the Bill. The Government recommended British Standard 5750 because they wanted demonstrably high standards. Again, there is a special opportunity to benefit from inspectors. They said that they would encourage schemes based on British Standard 5750. On audits, they said that we need regular assessments plus notification of self-verification equipment for sample checking. That is not included in the Bill. The Government's response to the Eden report went on to state:

"The inspector will have powers to issue instructions to a SVO regarding verification procedures and powers to embargo equipment where the spot checks have revealed an unsatisfactory performance by the SVO."

That is not in the Bill, but it is in the Government's response to the report. The Government should have come forward with comprehensive legislation to cover those points.

Trading standards officers are the weights and measures authority in this aspect of the law, and they should remain so. The amendment should be accepted. If not, the Bill should be withdrawn in favour of a Government Bill.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I declare an interest. I am a consultant to the National Federation of Scale and Weighing Machine Manufacturers. I have never made any secret of the fact that I have brought the Bill forward so that this country should be ahead of its rivals in Europe when self-verification is introduced, willy-nilly, in 1991—whether or not the Bill is passed.

Three hon. Members have tabled amendments. I wrote to all three, inviting them to tell me about their specific complaints and seeking to satisfy them. The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) replied, but the other two did not. I am sorry about that. The only organisations that have formally come to me have been the Association of County Councils and the Institute of Trading Standards Administration. Both organisations have points to make about my Bill. I met representatives from both organisations, we discussed our views, and amendments to satisfy their requirements were tabled in my name.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central is under many serious misapprehensions. Had he given me a chance to explain more fully the circumstances of the Bill he would have understood that, far from encouraging the nefarious activities that he described, it is a small measure which may affect no more than a dozen manufacturers and will free trading standards officers for other duties which they constantly tell us they have no time to pursue. I do not understand why there should be such a wave of opposition to this extremely minor measure.

2.15 pm

Mrs. Dunwoody: As I was one of the hon. Members to whom the hon. Gentleman was kind enough to write, I apologise to him for not having replied. The reason for that is that I was consulting at considerable depth with those who will be most directly affected. When I first put down my carefully considered new clause, it was the hon. Gentleman's intention to pursue the Bill without having consulted me, although he may have consulted other hon. Members. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if he felt that it was discourteous that there was no official reply to his letter. Had there been considerable consultation with all hon. Members concerned about the Bill, there might have been greater understanding of his position. No one objects to his making his attitude clear, but there are real objections on behalf of the consumers. It is quite wrong to suggest that only the weights and measures officers are involved.

Mr. Wiggin: The hon. Lady knows that those interested in the Bill, including consumers, were represented on the Eden committee, which produced a unanimous report. In the period between publication of the Eden committee report and the Government's response, all interested organisations made their views known. That was why we saw no reason for individual consultation.

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wiggin: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Skinner: I have a letter from the Consumers Association—the publishers of *Which?*—dated 27 April, which is after all the consultations had taken place. It says:

"Dear Mr. Skinner,

I am writing to draw attention to our misgivings over the 'Weights and Measures (Amendments) Bill', and to request your support in opposing . . . Although this bill appears uncontroversial, it does, in fact, overturn basic measures of consumer protection which have been taken for granted for over 100 years."

I have not been involved with any of the amendments. I just read the letter and thought that the Consumers Association obviously had a case.

Mr. Wiggin: The hon. Gentleman thought wrong. If the Consumers Association had had the courtesy to discuss the matter with me, it would not have written a letter based on so many misapprehensions and misconceptions. It has simply failed to understand what the Bill is about. I was alerted to the fact that the Consumers' Association had made representations to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin), but it did not copy those representations to me, nor did it consult me or ask for an explanation of the intentions of the Bill. If the trading standards officers, who would be freed from their duties by the application of the measure, were to apply themselves to the sort of things that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was talking about when he referred to cheating in the mines, I believe that it could be argued that this is a consumer protection measure which will improve consumer protection.

It is not fully understood that the licensing agreement from central Government will go only to manufacturers who obtain British Standard 5750.

Ms. Quin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wiggin: I will just finish my explanation, as it is important.

The suggestion that any manufacturer who applies will be permitted to stamp his own machines is ludicrous in the extreme. As a promoter of a previous consumer protection Bill, the Hallmarking Act 1973, I can say that the concept that our Government are not completely alert to the necessity to ensure that these things are done properly—they have been done properly in this country for many hundreds of years—is ludicrous. We are talking about technically difficult matters. Obtaining British Standard 5750 is not only a lengthy process, but an extremely expensive one involving staff at all levels in the company—from the managing director down to the chap who sweeps the floor. Few people will be able to afford or will take the trouble to obtain BS 5750. We believe that at present perhaps a dozen manufacturers in this country will be able to take advantage of the legislation.

Mr. Bermingham: Is the hon. Gentleman not saying that those who are in the club can therefore benefit from the club, and that that will exclude all the other manufacturers? What about companies which are beginning to develop in this sector? Unless they are part of that little group, they appear to be excluded.

Mr. Wiggin: They will go on in exactly the same manner as now and a trading standards officer will visit them and stamp their machines as and when required.

Ms. Quin: The hon. Gentleman refers to the fact that the Consumers Association has written to me as well as to other hon. Members outlining its objections to the Bill. Does he agree that as he knew that the Consumers Association was party to the widespread agreement to the Eden committee recommendations it would have been better to consult that association before putting pen to paper to devise his Bill? Does he also agree that instead of his being placed in this difficult position it would have been much better if the Government had brought forward a measure which incorporated the Eden recommendations and therefore satisfied all parties?

Mr. Wiggin: I had assumed, with good reason, that as a result of its presence on the Eden committee and its constant communications with the Government on that matter subsequently, there was no reason to believe that the Consumers Association, of all people, would be disturbed by the Bill. Its relevance to the consumer is remote.

The young man at the Consumers Association whom I telephoned on hearing of his concern said that he would write to me that very day. The letter was delivered on Wednesday night, but I cannot carry out negotiations on such a complex matter in 24 hours. He will receive a detailed critique of all his detailed points, but there is no substance in them and the consumer has nothing to fear from the Bill. It is a thin argument to suggest that manufacturers' costs may be modestly affected and that, therefore, the costs of weighing machines may be passed on to the public. The consumer has nothing to fear from the Bill. The application of trading standards will continue as before. It is the manufacture and, perhaps, the subsequent installation and repair of weighing machines that is involved. This Bill is not about the checking of weighing machines. No one is suggesting that there should be any change in current arrangements for that.

The substance of the Opposition's objections to the Bill was revealed by the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central, who said that they were very annoyed that they had got only a slice of the cake and that they would not allow the Bill to pass because they wanted the whole cake.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister because the Bill would give us a substantial lead over other European countries in subsequent negotiations. Obviously the necessary expertise is being applied to advise authorities in Brussels of the likely outcome of events. By stopping the Bill, the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central is simply allowing the French and the Germans to take a lead in a matter in which we are perfectly able to take the lead.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman says that we could steal a march on the Europeans if the Bill were passed. If the Government had activated the Eden committee report in 1986 when they accepted its recommendations, we should have gained a further three years on the Europeans.

Mr. Wiggin: I cannot argue about the desirability of bringing forward a Bill covering all the Eden recommendations, especially as it would contain the measures proposed in the Bill before us.

I have a letter to the Scottish local authorities from my hon. Friend the Minister in which he makes clear the Government's intention to bring forward a Bill. We all know that the timetable in this place is already full and my hon. Friend the Minister was unable to argue that this

matter was of sufficient priority for the Government to produce a Bill. The failure to produce such a Bill is a poor reason for opposing my measure, which is simply part of that measure. The argument that a Bill covering all the Eden recommendations has not been introduced is not a good basis for opposition. In the light of that explanation, I should have thought that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central would think carefully about the substance of his complaint.

My amendments have been tabled at the request of the Association of County Councils. I believe that it is perfectly reasonable that the local trading standards office should be consulted before a licence is issued. The suggestion that the scheme should not be administered nationally shows that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central does not understand how the administration of weights and measures is conducted. Trading standards offices receive, at regular intervals, central guidance notes from the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, which is held in the highest esteem by all concerned.

Nowadays, we deal in high technology. The old weighing machine with a weight on one side and the item to be weighed on the other has gone. We now have sophisticated electronic instruments. The concept of a trading standards officer even understanding their operation let alone the adjustment of them, is clearly completely out of date. It is because the manufacturers are the best people for that job that the Bill suggests that they should be allowed to mark the machines on their own premises. Once that machine comes out of the factory, there is nothing to stop the trading standards officer putting his measured weight on it to check its accuracy. The checks and duties of the trading standards officer, as carried out today, will continue. I do not believe that the Consumers Association or any other organisation can suggest that the consumers' interests will be affected in any way. The present arrangements simply allow the trading standards officer's inspection to become the final inspection within the factory process. That is deeply unsatisfactory.

If any Opposition Member wishes to have a full explanation of the motives and merits of the Bill, and to discuss any fears that he or she might have about it, I am ready and available to do so. I am deeply sorry that I have not been given the opportunity to do so before.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): With the permission of the Committee, I shall take this opportunity, although time is running out, to set out the background. Questions have been raised about the Government's position, and it will help hon. Members if I set it out briefly.

Hon. Members will be aware that the Eden committee was asked by the Government to review the arrangements for the legal control of measuring equipment in use for trade. One of the key recommendations of the committee, which included representatives from consumer bodies, and, as has been said, trading standards interests and equipment manufacturers, was that a self-verification scheme should be introduced. This scheme would allow properly accredited manufacturers, installers and repairers of trade equipment to verify and stamp equipment which had been shown to meet legal requirements, rather than requiring a trading standards officer to fulfil the task.

In accepting that recommendation in its published response, the Government fully endorsed the committee's commitment to ensuring that the public's confidence in fair trading should be maintained. To this end, the scheme would be available only to those companies accredited against stringent quality assurance criteria, and the expertise of the local authorities' trading standards officers would be used in the accreditation and auditing of the scheme. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that there would be any compromise of consumer protection. My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) has introduced this Bill which seeks to amend the Weights and Measures Act 1985 so that a self-verification scheme could be introduced. The measures proposed in the Bill are consistent with those outlined in Cmnd. 9850 for the introduction of a self-verification scheme, and therefore the Bill has Government support. Similarly, the amendments tabled in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare have sought to meet the quite proper concerns of trading standards officers and consumer interests and, therefore, should receive hon. Members' support.

As the Eden committee recognised, the technical complexity of weighing and measuring equipment increases inexorably—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare—and self verification, properly based on sound quality assurance principles, is the way forward. Other countries have already introduced schemes of this kind and we can certainly expect the impending Community directives on measuring instruments to include provisions for self verification. The United Kingdom rightly has an international reputation for the effectiveness of its weights and measures controls, and also for pioneering work on quality assurance certification. We want to take this opportunity to introduce a national self verification scheme and maintain our position in Europe as enlightened regulators for the benefit of manufacturers, consumers and the enforcement authorities.

I shall state the Government's position on the amendments as they arise.

Mr. Bermingham: I am always worried when a promoter of a Bill says that it is promoted in the interests of that section of the community who will be able to verify its own interests. Unless someone, who may be a manufacturer, is one of that group, he or she will still be subject to the same British Standard 5750 and cannot be part of the club.

I am even more concerned that a Minister should come to the Dispatch Box and agree that the Government had read the committee's report and accepted all its recommendations but will choose to implement just a few of them because that might help us in Europe.

I am even more concerned when the Bill's promoter says that trading standards officers should not be involved because they do not have the technical expertise to deal with these matters. That is not right or proper. I expect the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) to withdraw that comment; it was a nasty slur that was unworthy of him.

Trading standard officers in St. Helens have expressed grave concerns to me about the Bill——

It being half-past Two o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report progress and ask leave to sit again.*

[Mr. Bermingham]

Committee report progress; to sit again on Friday 5 May.

Private Members' Bills

ANIMAL PROTECTION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Those of us who are concerned about animal welfare will be back again and again and again on this issue. The next time we shall be back will be a week today.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

ABORTION (RIGHT OF CONSCIENCE) (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

FIRE SAFETY INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

PUBLIC SAFETY INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 May.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why do the Government keep objecting to these safety measures?

MISUSE OF DRUGS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 July.

RESALE OF TICKETS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 July.

HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 May.

JUNIOR HOSPITAL DOCTORS (REGULATION OF HOURS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Not moved.

INDECENT DISPLAYS (NEWSPAPERS AND WORKPLACES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

RIDERS OF EQUINE ANIMALS (WEARING OF PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

LICENSING AMENDMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

WASTE RECYCLING (PAPER) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed.

MR. SPEAKER'S ABSENCE

Ordered,

That Mr. Speaker have leave of absence on Friday 5th May to attend the solemn sitting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 4th May, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Motions in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Controls of Persons at Intra-Community Frontiers and Public Procurement may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after each of them has been entered upon; and if proceedings thereon have not been disposed of at the expiration of that period, Mr. Speaker shall then put any Questions necessary to dispose of them.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth].*

India and Nepal (Aid)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

2.33 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): We have had a long association and friendship with both India and Nepal, which has been in two directions. We have provided aid to India which, over the past eight years, has totalled no less than £910 million. That works out at an average of £113·75 million per year. The figures vary from year to year because the agreed projects that are taken up are not even in number throughout the years and in some years the take-up is greater than in others. That is why we must look at this in averages.

During that period we have had a major hand in helping the Rihand coal-fired power station with £117 million, the Bharat Aluminium Company thermal power plant with £131 million; £24 million has been provided for low-cost housing; £15 million for social forestry projects in Karnataka; £31 million for long-wall mining technology; and £24 million has been provided for the Indo-British fertiliser education project. All are important aspects of aid which can be expected to continue in the future. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will say more about that later.

During a similar period, Nepal has received just over £70 million. That works out at an average of £8·75 million per year. It has contributed to the Dharan-Dhanjuta road in east Nepal and has provided help with the tea industry, with rural development in the Kosi hills, with grain storage, with an earth satellite station and—most important—reafforestation in the middle hills. With Nepal's increasing population, there is a problem about obtaining fuel and large amounts of forest have been denuded. That is bad for the soil, which is then washed away down the mountains by the rivers, making it difficult to work the remaining farms properly and effectively. Therefore, reafforestation is important.

In the past, the attitude behind our aid has been to help to renew those natural resources that can be renewed, to provide effective communications, to provide health care —including, of course, an improved water supply—and especially, to help with education and training. In return, we have been able to export a considerable amount of goods to India. In 1983 we exported no less than £805 million worth of goods to India. That has risen steadily until in 1988 the estimated figure was £1,112 million.

The Nepalese have a special relationship with this country. I need hardly remind the House that it goes back a long way. For 173 years Nepal has been providing us with soldiers for the British Army and for the Indian army when it was under British control. The Nepalese will provide an effective service to the British Crown for many years to come because we are experiencing the problems of the demographic trough, which means that the number of service personnel in the British Army in the next 20 years is likely to be much lower than in the past, especially in infantry regiments. That means that we shall be relying even more on the Nepalese Gurkhas to help us with our defence commitments.

I was sorry that we were unable to help more in providing for the future of the station of Dharan. My hon. Friend knows my feelings about this. I wish that we had managed to retain it permanently because once one

[Mr. Neil Thorne]

recruits to a particular area and provides a valuable service in terms of a hospital and medical treatment, one finds that service people tend to retire to such areas.

The value of the properties and the number built in that area depend upon the presence of a facility at Dharan. About 18 months ago the Government decided to close that, and it is now in the process of being wound down. That is unfortunate because it made a major and significant contribution to the economy in that part of Nepal.

The King of Nepal, His Majesty King Birendra, is a conscientious monarch and spends at least two months of every year visiting his people in the hills. I have personal experience of that. It is a wonderful thing to do and says a great deal for the king's dedication and his keenness and enthusiasm. He finds out a good deal about his people and his experience of their trials and tribulations and finds out where they most need help. That means that he is in a good position to see exactly where there are problems and where some assistance is required.

It came as a great disappointment to many hon. Members to learn about a breakdown in the trade and transit arrangements between these two friends of ours. Nepal is a land-locked country. It has China through Tibet on the northern border, which has two very difficult passes, and on the southern, eastern and western borders it has India. Until recently, as a result of a treaty which came into effect in 1978, there were no fewer than 15 crossing points for trade and transit, but that treaty came to an end about 12 months ago. Two extensions of six months were granted but then, at short notice, the agreement was terminated. Considerable difficulty is now being experienced in getting goods across the border because only two crossing points remain open. They are probably the most important of the crossing points and are at Raxaul and Jogbani. The end of the agreement has caused severe restriction and great difficulty for this land-locked country.

No fewer than 90 hon. Members have signed an early-day motion drawing attention to their concern about this situation. Quite clearly we must all be concerned because we are providing aid to two countries which are not trading freely or having free transit between one another. Much of the aid, especially to the smaller country, is dissipated in extra expense because of the closing of the border in so many areas. Civil servants in Delhi have said that the majority of essential materials are passing across the frontier despite the restrictions introduced in March, but that has not been found to be so by some people. I had a letter only yesterday from a constitutent whose son is working on behalf of the CARE charity in Nepal. His efforts are being severely restricted because he is unable to get petrol to move about the country to provide the important help that is required. He has told his mother that paraffin for cooking and sugar and soap are not easily available, that petrol is severely rationed and that medicines and hospital supplies are in short supply. This is a most serious matter when one is trying to help some of the poorest people in the world and also to ensure that the money spent by the British taxpayer in providing afforestation projects is not undermined by the wood being cut down to provide heat for cooking, necessary though that purpose is. Much of the money that the British taxpayer is paying for reafforestation, particularly in the middle hills of Nepal, is likely to be wasted if the situation that I have described continues for much longer.

I understand that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi is keen that the matter should be solved as quickly as possible. Of course, sometimes civil servants have a way of holding things up. My hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will know that not so long ago I had to deal with the question of some gold taken off a plane in Calcutta when it was being transported back legally from Hong Kong to Nepal by Gurkha servicemen to purchase land. Such a technical holdup may go on for months or even years while lawyers do their best to unravel the problems.

That kind of situation cannot be allowed to make life so difficult for people in parts of the world such as India and Nepal. There are good reasons why the two countries should have a very harmonious relationship in transit and trade. India is the largest democracy in the world, and Nepal relies on its goods transiting through India. In fact, 90 per cent. of Nepal's trade is with India. Thus, the two countries have a very close-knit involvement. At the same time they are entirely independent and sovereign states, and, as such, should be able to expect their goods to be allowed to be transmitted through adjoining countries without unnecessary let or hindrance.

Many agreements previously entered into, some of which extend until 1991, have had to be suspended because of this embargo. Diesel fuel, paraffin for cooking, baby food, medical supplies and salt are some of the products affected. Clearly, we must show concern about the situation. Coal is also important. Recently, 2,000 tonnes of coal has been released by India, but that is only a small proportion of the 1988 quota of 80,000 tonnes still due. The Nepalese cement industry, which relies on coal from India, is now in a desperate situation. Although Nepal entered into a contract with the Salt Corporation of India for the supply of salt until 1991, inadequate supplies of salt are being allowed into Nepal. Customs duty of about 145 per cent. is being imposed on Nepalese exports to India, leading to a virtual stoppage. That, too, is a serious matter.

Any reasonable person would be concerned about the matters that I have raised. While Mr. Rajiv Gandhi knows about the situation, I do not think he really appreciates its extent, because I am sure that if he did he would take urgent action to put it right. In the interests of the three countries concerned—India, Nepal and the United Kingdom—I hope the problem can be solved urgently. It affects the British taxpayer for the reasons that I have explained to my hon. Friend the Minister. I trust that it will be possible to unravel this matter very soon so that the trade and transit arrangements can be allowed to continue.

I should have thought that in the short term it would be sensible to allow the previous arrangements to continue for a further 12 months and in the meantime to come to a permanent arrangement for the two separate issues—trade and transit. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to do everything possible to ensure that the matter is resolved to everyone's honour and satisfaction.

2.50 pm

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) has kindly agreed that I should speak for a moment or two in support of his excellent speech. He brings to the House a special knowledge of the kingdom of Nepal and its

relationship with India because he is the chairman of the all-party Nepalese group and a distinguished member of the Select Committee on Defence, and he has a special knowledge of the Gurkhas.

This is a serious matter. There is widespread support for my hon. Friend's points inside the House and in the country. The United Kingdom has had a special relationship with the kingdom of Nepal since 1815. Many of the Nepalese nationals have served in Her Majesty's forces and continue to do so. Several hundreds, if not thousands, of residents in Nepal receive pensions from the United Kingdom Government for their service. Many of them are suffering hardship as a result of the expiry of the treaties and the failure to find a solution of the problem between India and Nepal.

We all know that the United Kingdom has an excellent relationship with India. We are the firmest of friends with that great country and recognise its contribution to the work of the Commonwealth and the democratic principle. It is especially sad that the present situation should have arisen between two countries with which the United Kingdom has a special regard and affection.

It will not do for the Foreign Office to sit on the fence as the Minister of State, Lord Glenarthur, implies in correspondence to me. He observed that he hopes that the issue will be settled and that the Foreign Office will

"continue to follow events with keen attention."

It will not do simply to be an observer of events. We have an interest and a concern. We must ask the Government to use their best influence with our friends in New Delhi and on behalf of the kingdom of Nepal to ensure that there is a solution in that part of the world for which we have a special regard and an historical link.

3.52 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Christopher Patten): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) for giving us this opportunity to discuss the problems and challenges of development in south Asia. My hon. Friend is an acknowledged authority on Nepal and no one has done more to strengthen the good relations between the kingdom of Nepal and this country. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) for contributing to the debate. Any contribution which my hon. Friend makes in the House is stamped with his considerable common sense.

I am aware of the strong views of hon. Members on this subject, as is my noble Friend, Lord Glenarthur, the Minster of State to whose correspondence my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North referred. The strong views expressed in this debate and in other ways will be noted beyond the House.

I want to begin by referring to the aid and development issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South. On the face of it, there may appear a sharp contrast between Nepal, on the one hand, a small mountainous kingdom and still very largely an agrarian society, and, on the other, India, the second most populous country in the world with a large and growing industrial sector. In fact, their similarities are more significant than their differences. They both face the same basic challenge which is to raise the standard of living of their peoples, the majority of whom live in absolute poverty or close to it. Our aid programmes to both countries—the subject of the debate—are aimed at assisting them with that challenge.

Nepal has only opened itself up to international trade and aid, and to all the influences that go with them, in the past 25 years. It is all the more encouraging that it has chosen to follow the path of economic rectitude and has adopted a structural adjustment programme under the aegis of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It has followed that programme with considerable commitment and success. I commend the admirable progress made by the Nepal Government in the past few months.

During my visit to Nepal in March 1988—which was a particularly enjoyable as well as useful visit—I was pleased to be able to offer British support for is programme in the form of a pledge of programme aid worth £5 million. I also pledged £10 million of aid to Nepal's major hydro-electric development at Arun. That and other hydro-electric proposals lie at the heart of Nepal's development prospects. They offer the possibility of a massive jump in gross national product in the next decade or two—some reports say, as much as 25 per cent. The only market for power on that scale is India, which has its own implications for the future.

To put massive development of that kind into place, Nepal must first develop its basic infrastructure. The backbone of its transport and communications is the road system. That is an area in which we made a major investment through the aid programme—difficult though that can be—and we plan to continue doing so in future, in close collaboration with the Swiss aid programme. The Swiss have slightly more experience of road building in mountains than ourselves. Our aim is not only to develop, repair and maintain Nepal's road system but to strengthen the country's own capacity to undertake those tasks.

That kind of institutional strengthening also lies behind our support for the Nepal Administrative Staff College, which trains Government officials in Nepal, and our close links with Budhanilkantha school, from which Nepal's future generations of leaders in government and industry will come. I paid a particularly interesting visit to that school and was very impressed both by the quality of education provided and by the spirit of community that one felt there.

Earlier I mentioned the major challenge faced by India and Nepal of alleviating poverty. It is entirely appropriate that His Majesty the King of Nepal pledged his Government to meet the basic needs of his people by the year 2000. That is an ambitious target. As one would expect of a very poor country, all the social indicators look grim. Levels of literacy are very low by south Asian standards, infant and maternal mortality is very high, and the population growth rate is alarming—especially given the rapid degeneration of the physical environment.

Nowhere are those problems more acute than in the hills. In our long-standing project on the Kosi hills we have assisted the local inhabitants in tackling those problems in an integrated fashion, with a special emphasis on forestry, agriculture and water supply. I should like more time to speak about forestry, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South said, is an extremely important subject. Alas, I must move on.

We agreed with the Government of Nepal that we should assist also in developing a system of primary health care that will reach out to the people in the eastern hills and provide them with the basic health services that they so urgently need. I cannot pass over the question of health without mentioning the British military hospital at

[Mr. Christopher Patten]

Dharan, which was considered in the recent interesting report of the Defence Committee on the future of the brigade of Gurkhas. I do not wish to anticipate the Government's response to that report, but, as my hon. Friend will know from our evidence to that Committee, we propose to provide a package of £3 million of aid to assist in the conversion of that hospital to civilian use and to maintain the standards of care at that hospital for the benefit of the people in the eastern hills.

It will be clear from my comments that we have an expanding aid programme in Nepal. We expect that our aid disbursements for this financial year will be about 50 per cent. higher than they were two years ago—£14 million compared with £9 million. This programme reflects the long friendship between our countries, which has been exemplified by the brave and committed service of the brigade of Gurkhas, in peace and in war.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South referred to our aid programme in India. It reflects our historic connections with India and the considerable poverty and needs faced by India. More people live in absolute poverty in India than in the whole of Latin America. Over the years, we have found that we are capable of running in partnership with the Indian authorities especially valuable and effective projects. We are trying to help in the power, railways, agriculture and social sectors. I have been particularly impressed by projects which I have seen which attempt to alleviate poverty directly and improve education standards—for example, the work that we are doing in Visak and Hyderabad on slum improvement and on the primary education project in Andhra Pradesh. That is a good programme, and I hope that we continue to apply aid effectively in India.

I turn to the kernal of the argument put by my hon. Friends. They referred to the current state of bilateral relations between India and Nepal and to the dispute which has arisen between them which concerns arrangements for trade, transit and similar matters. The Government greatly value the rich and diverse web of links which bind Britain to Nepal and to India and which are firmly rooted in tradition and history. I know the importance attached by hon. Members and people in the country to sustaining and developing those links. My hon. Friends have referred to that point in relation to Nepal and India. That is certainly the Government's aim.

It is naturally of considerable concern and regret to us that a dispute should have arisen between two countries with which we enjoy close and friendly relations. I well understand and appreciate the feeling in the House over recent developments. I share hon. Members hope that the dispute will not be damaging to the people of Nepal or India or have any lasting impact on their economic development.

We have followed events with keen attention from the outset and will continue to do so. The World bank is evaluating the effects of the dispute and is co-ordinating with donors. There is no sign as yet that special measures are necessary. We shall consider any well-founded requests as sympathetically as we always do, but we look forward to the resolution of the dispute before that stage is reached. We very much hope that India and Nepal, as sovereign and independent countries, will soon resolve their differences in a way satisfactory to both and so bring the dispute to an end. I wish them every success in doing so. In this connection, it is encouraging that both sides are reportedly willing to hold bilateral discussions to bring about a resolution of the problem. My hon. Friends have set out their argument eloquently and potently and made clear their considerable anxiety about the dispute. I shall ensure that their views, including those of my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North on my noble Friend's correspondence, are drawn to the attention of Ministers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who, I am sure, will read the report of the debate with interest and concern.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 17 April 1989

TRANSPORT

British Rail Staff (Working Hours)

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will use the powers available to him under the Regulation of Railways Act to require British Rail to supply him with regular returns of working hourse of *(a)* drivers, *(b)* signalmen and *(c)* other staff.

Mr. Portillo: There is no requirement in legislation for the British Railways Board to provide the Secretary of State with regular returns of working hours. The Transport Act 1962 places upon the board a duty to provide railway services having due regard to efficiency, economy and safety of operation. The question of working hours is therefore a matter of management for the board.

BR Services (Manchester-Stockport)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has had any approach from British Railways to withdraw its passenger service from Manchester Victoria to Stockport via Miles Platting, Denton and Reddish, south; and whether such a service will be maintained after 15 May.

Mr. Portillo: We have received no such proposal. The timetabling and routing of services are entirely a matter for the board.

Road Traffic Growth

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was his Department's forecast rate of road traffic growth and the actual rate for each of the last five years;

(2) what is the Department's current forecast rate of road traffic growth for each of the next three years;

(3) what percentage increase in road traffic is anticipated by the year 1999.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department's estimates of traffic growth compared with actual growth are as follows for the years requested:

Growth (per cent.)

Year	*Low*	*High*	*Actual*
1984	1·9	3·3	4·5
1985	1·7	3·2	3·1
1986	1·6	3·1	6·1
1987	1·5	3·0	5·6
1988	1·6	2·9	5·2

The forecasts for annual traffic growth for the next three years are as follows:

Annual growth (per cent.)

Year	*Low*	*High*
1989	1·16	2·49
1990	1·15	2·50
1991	1·07	2·18

The increase in road traffic from 1988 to 1999 is forecast to be between 10 and 22·5 per cent.

The Department's forecasts are for long-term traffic growth. They are not intended to provide accurate forecasts for individual years or short periods.

The forecasts of growth are presented as a range to reflect uncertainty about growth in factors underlying traffic growth, such as GDP and fuel prices. They are based on the forecasts given in "National Road Traffic Forecasts 1984" issued by the Department in March 1985. The forecasts are for all motor traffic excluding motor cycles.

Road Building (White Paper)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his White Paper on the future road building programme for Britain.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the late spring or summer.

Motorways (Speed Limit)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is taken to record systematically vehicle speeds on motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Automatic traffic counters, which also measure vehicle speeds, are being installed at 25 motorway sites. At present, speed data are being obtained from two of these sites; another eight should be supplying data by the end of the year, with the remaining 15 becoming operational in 1990.

These data will enable vehicle speeds, and trends in vehicle speeds, to be analysed by type of vehicle and time of day. It is unlikely that it will be possible to do such analyses until mid-1990 because of the need to have a sufficient number of sites supplying reliable, consistent, data.

Road Building

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost of the national road building programme in East Sussex for 1988-89 and for 1989-90.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Expenditure on national trunk road programme schemes in East Sussex is as follows:

	£ million
1988-89	4·2
1989-90	[1]21·0

[1] (estimated).

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress of the current road building programme in the north west.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Five major motorway and trunk road construction contracts are currently under way. The total works value is around £80 million. Work continues on other improvements and maintenance of the network.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce early conditional acceptance in the Cleveland TPP bid of the Stockton south spine road; and when commencement of the project will occur.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: All local highway authorities have been invited to submit bids by 31 July for transport supplementary grant for 1990-91. Decisions on the allocation of resources will be announced later in the year. The programme for construction of this scheme is a matter for Cleveland county council.

Railways

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the options being considered for the future operation and management of British Rail; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to set up a national track authority to lease track time to competing companies on a national or regional basis; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he has any plans to re-introduce regional railway companies to operate a full range of services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I am considering the long-term options for British Rail including privatisation. The possibilities for privatisation include: a single privatised company to run the entire network; a division into several independent companies based on British Rail's business sectors; a division into a number of independent regional companies; a vertically separated railway industry with track owned by a track authority on which independent companies would run services; or a combination of these. We are not yet in a position to take decisions.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent the building of the second Severn crossing is dependent upon assessment of future traffic flows.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The decision to build the second Severn crossing has already been taken.

A50

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what decisions he has reached about the proposed changes in the A50 road through Stoke-on-Trent; and if a date has been arranged for the consequent inquiry.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Final design is being undertaken to enable publication of the complete package of draft statutory orders in November this year. Arrangements for an inquiry cannot be made until objections are known. If one is necessary for this scheme we would expect it to take place in the spring of 1990.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there have been any recent developments in regard to new routes from the United States to Manchester airport; if he expects any further developments in the near future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government have continued to press the United States authorities to agree a reasonable exchange of rights to enable new routes to be established between the United States and Manchester airport. The United States has been considering an offer we made earlier in the year and has recently promised revised and comprehensive counter-proposals.

King's Cross Fire (Inquiry)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost of the King's Cross public inquiry; and which parties appearing before the inquiry received reimbursement of legal costs.

Mr. Portillo: The cost to the Department of the King's Cross investigation, excluding staff costs, was about £1·2 million. The Department does not have information on the costs incurred by others. My right hon. Friend made it clear to the House on 10 November that he had accepted in full Mr. Fennell's recommendations about the award of costs to represented parties as set out in paragraphs 4-8 of chapter 21 of his report; claims are being settled on that basis.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 6 and 7 respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mrs. Rumbold: The numbers and proportion of women at 1 September 1988 were:

		Percentage
Grades 1 to 5	22	15
Grade 6	104	25
Grade 7	36	26
Overall	162	23

We do not hold information on the ethnic origin of all our staff but of those who have responded to the ethnic monitoring survey, those from ethnic minorities were:

	Number
Grades 1 to 7	[1]10

[1] 1·7 per cent. of respondents in those grades.

The survey was conducted on the undertaking that anonymity would be preserved. Any further breakdown of the figures could identify individuals and cannot therefore be provided.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: A survey of all the Department's employees was carried out in 1986 since when all new recruits have been asked to complete an ethnic monitoring questionnaire on a voluntary basis. We are proposing to conduct another survey later in the year.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mrs. Rumbold: Recruitment of grades above administrative officer is carried out by the Civil Service Commission.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* universities and *(c)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department of Education and Science purchased nine vehicles in 1988 at a total cost of £48,041·45. I am unable to confirm that these vehicles were United Kingdom-produced, on the definition employed by the DTI for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom-produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value, but they are all of EC origin. The information sought regarding the universities and other public sector agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible is not held centrally.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimated number of settlers from Turkey, who are now living in the occupied area of northern Cyprus.

Mrs. Chalker: I told the House on 10 June 1988, at column 696, in answer to a question from the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), that we estimated that there were then about 35,000 non-Cypriot settlers in northern Cyprus. We have no evidence to suggest there has been any change in the meantime.

British Citizens (Thailand)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *107-8*, what representations he has made to the Thai authorities regarding British citizens imprisoned there, in particular in respect of those held in chains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: When British prisoners have been shackled in circumstances not covered by normal Thai practice, Her Majesty's embassy at Bangkok have made effective representations and the chains have been removed.

Her Majesty's embassy continue closely to monitor conditions under which British prisoners are held, to ensure that these are no worse than those applied to Thai or other prisoners.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made about the treatment of Edward Heaton-Smith, presently held in Phitsanalok prison, Thailand; what information he has about the conditions in which he is held, particularly with regard to his continuing isolation from other foreign nationals, the duration of his being shackled in leg-irons and his ill-treatment at the hands of the prison authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Representations made to the Thai authorities by Her Majesty's Embassy at Bangkok have met with the following responses:

(a) Leg-irons are worn by all new arrivals at a prison. Their release is conditional on the prisoner satisfying the prison authorities as to his conduct. Mr. Heaton-Smith has not met the latter criterion;

(b) a report on the alleged ill-treatment is awaited from the prison governor;

(c) Mr. Heaton-Smith will be transferred to Klong Prem prison, where there are British prisoners; but he first has a charge to face in Phitsanulock.

The British Consul visited Mr. Heaton-Smith on 16 March 1989, when he showed no signs of malnutrition or abuse.

Soviet Trade Inspectors

Mr. D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Soviet trade inspectors there are in the United Kingdom monitoring the manufacture by British companies of goods and equipment to be delivered to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics under export contracts; and what were the comparable figures for each of the last five years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The figures for the number of Soviet trade inspectors resident in the United Kingdom over the last four years are as follows:

	Number
1986	20
1987	17
1988	21
1989	27

Records of previous years were not kept in the same way, and comparable figures prior to 1986 are therefore not available.

Human Rights

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in *(a)* Bhutan, *(b)* Brunei, *(c)* Burma, *(d)* China, *(e)* Taiwan, *(f)* Hong Kong, *(g)* India, *(h)* Indonesia, *(i)* Iran, *(j)* Iraq, *(k)* Israel, *(l)* Japan, *(m)* Jordan, *(n)* Kampuchea, *(o)* North Korea, *(p)* South Korea, *(q)* Kuwait, *(r)* Laos, *(s)* Lebanon, *(t)* Macao, *(u)* Mongolia, *(v)* Maldives and *(w)* Malaysia; and which organisations made these representations;

(2) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in *(a)* Nicaragua *(b)* the Netherlands Antilles, *(c)* St. Vincent and the Grenadines, *(d)* El Salvador, *(e)* Trinidad and Tobago, *(f)* Turks and Caicos Islands, *(g)* the British Virgin Islands, *(h)* the United States Virgin Islands, *(i)* Argentina, *(j)* Bolivia, *(k)* Brazil, *(l)* Chile, *(m)* Colombia, *(n)* Ecudaor, *(o)* French Guiana, *(p)* Guyana,

(q) Paraguay, (r) Peru, (s) Surinam, (t) Uruguay, (u) Venezuela, (v) South Georgia, (w) Falklands Islands, (x) Afghanistan, (y) Bahrain and (z) Bangladesh; and which organisations made these representations;

(3) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in (a) France, (b) East Germany, (c) West Germany, (d) Gibraltar, (e) Antigua and Barbuda, (f) Bahamas, (g) Barbados, (h) Belize, (i) Bermuda, (j) Cayman Islands, (k) Costa Rica, (l) Cuba, (m) Dominica, (n) the Dominican Republic, (o) Grenada, (p) Guadeloupe, (q) Guatemala, (r) Haiti, (s) Honduras, (t) Jamacia, (u) Martinique, (v) Montserrat, (w) St. Lucia, (x) St. Christopher and Nevis, (y) Puerto Rico and (z) Panama; and which organisations made these representations;

(4) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in (a) Nepal, (b) Oman, (c) Pakistan, (d) Philippines, (e) Qatar, (f) Saudi Arabia, (g) Singapore, (h) Sri Lanka, (i) Syria, (j) Thailand, (k) Turkey, (l) the Asian Republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, (m) United Arab Emirates, (n) Vietnam, (o) North Yemen, (p) South Yemen, (q) Albania, (r) Andorra, (s) Austria, (t) Belgium, (u) Bulgaria, (v) Cyprus, (w) Czechoslovakia, (x) Denmark, (y) Faroe Islands and (z) Finland; and which organisations made those representations;

(5) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in (a) Yugoslavia, (b) Australia, (c) Norfolk Islands, (d) Fiji, (e) French Polynesia, (f) Guam, (g) Kiribati, (h) Marshall Islands, (i) Micronesia, (j) Nauru, (k) New Caledonia, (l) New Zealand, (m) Cook Islands, (n) Nive, (o) Ross Dependency, (p) Northern Mariana Islands, (q) Palau, (r) Papua New Guinea, (s) Pitcairn Islands, (t) Eastern Samoa, (u) Western Samoa, (v) Soloman Islands, (w) Tonga, (x) Tuvalu, (y) Vanuatu and (z) Wallis and Fortuna Islands; and which organisations made those representations;

(6) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in (a) Senegal, (b) Seychelles, (c) Sierra Leone, (d) Somalia, (e) South Africa, (f) the Republic of Ireland, (g) Iceland, (h) Hungary, (i) Greece, (j) Italy, (k) Liechtenstein, (l) Luxembourg, (m) Malta and Gozo, (n) Monaco, (o) the Netherlands, (p) Norway, (q) Poland, (r) Portugal, (s) Romania, (t) San Marino, (u) Spain, (v) Sweden, (w) Switzerland, (x) Turkey, (y) European Russia and (z) the Vatican City State; and which organisations made those representations;

(7) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in (a) Cote d'Ivoire, (b) Djibouti, (c) Egypt, (d) Guinea, (e) Ethiopia, (f) Gabon, (g) Gambia, (h) Ghana, (i) Guinea-Bissau, (j) Kenya, (k) Lesotho, (l) Liberia, (m) Libya, (n) Madagascar, (o) Malawi, (p) Mali, (q) Mauritania, (q) Mauritius, (s) Mayotte, (t) Morocco, (u) Mozambique, (v) Namibia, (w) Niger, (x) Nigeria, (y) Rwanda and (z) St. Helena; and which organisations made those representations;

(8) how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in (a) Sudan, (b) Swaziland, (c) Tanzania, (d) Togo, (e) Tunisia, (f) Uganda, (g) Zaire, (h) Zambia, (i) Zimbabwe, (j) Canada, (k) Greenland, (l) Mexico, (m) United States, (n) Anguilla, (o) Algeria, (p) Angola, (q) Benin, (r) Botswana, (s) Burkina Faso, (t) Burundi, (u) Cameroon, (v) Cape Verde Islands, (w) the Central African Republic, (x) Chad, (y) Comoros and (z) Congo; and which organisations made those representations.

Mr. Eggar: We receive representations on a wide range of countries from many organisations and individuals. The precise information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in Aruba; and which organisations made those representations.

Mr. Eggar: We have checked our records for the last three years. In that time we have received no representations about the denial of human rights and the use of torture in Aruba.

Laos

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the President of the Soviet Union and other Soviet authorities regarding the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Laos and the present whereabouts of the former Laotian King Savang Vatthana and Crown Prince Vong Savang; what information he has of the whereabouts of the former Laotian Chief of Staff, General Phasouk S. Ratsphak; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We have not discussed the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Laos or the whereabouts of the former King and Crown Prince of Laos with the Soviet authorities, at least in recent years. We have no knowledge of General Phasoul S. Ratsphak.

Gibraltar

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Hornchurch, *Official Report*, 29 November 1988, column *185*, what response he has had from the Gibraltar authorities in respect of amending their law on consensual homosexual acts between males.

Mrs. Chalker: The Gibraltar Attorney General has prepared a Bill amending the law on consensual homosexual acts between males to conform with article 8 of the European convention on human rights. We understand that the Bill will shortly be submitted to the Council of Ministers for introduction in the Gibraltar House of Assembly.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many vehicles, and of what value, were purchased by (a) his Department and (b) other public sector agenices for which he is responsible in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Eggar: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office bought 240 vehicles at a cost of £3,089,600 in 1988. Other

public sector agencies for which the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has responsibility, purchased 32 vehicles at a cost of £275,000.

Most popular models of vehicle produced by the multinational manufacturers are built in the United Kingdom and other European countries. Using the definition employed by the DTI for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom-produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-work value, it is not possible to determine how many were United Kingdom-produced without individual inspection of each vehicle. Vehicles purchased by the FCO are considered British if they have been bought in the United Kingdom from a British manufacturer. On this basis, 176 vehicles were British.

In the same period, the Overseas Development Administration purchased 371 vehicles costing £3,785,000 and their public sector agencies nine vehicles costing £98,500. Of these, 372 were British.

Rain Forest

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to obtain for his departmental library a video copy of the "Horizon" programme on BBC2 on 10 April on the consequences to the Panama Canal of destruction of the central American forest.

Mr. Eggar: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office library does not normally stock audiovisual material or transcripts of television programmes. We are, however, fully aware of the contents of the programme concerned.

Ethiopia

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received the affadavit sworn by Ms. Jennie Street in Khartoum dated 12 February concering the use of napalm by the Ethiopian armed forces in Eritrea; and whether he will condemn its use against the civilian population of both Eritrea and Tigré.

Mrs. Chalker: We have a copy of this affidavit. While we have no means of verifying the allegations it contains, the frequency, and gravity, of such reports is cause for concern. We have made this known to Ethiopian authorities and raised the matter at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

ICAO Meetings

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of a report together with the findings of the meeting held under ICAO auspices from 6 to 10 March of international experts.

Mr. Waldegrave: The ICAO report of this meeting has not been published. For reasons that the House will appreciate, it is preferable that details of this work should not become publicly known.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will *(a)* place in the Library or *(b)* circulate in the *Official Report*, the names of those attending on behalf of the United Kingdom, the meetings from 6 to 10 March, held under ICAO auspices.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not the custom to name officials engaged in Government business. It would be particularly inappropriate to name those who are involved with this important and often sensitive work.

Semtex

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when and where he expects the international convention on the subject of Semtex envisaged in his answer of 10 April, *Official Report*, column 360, will take place; and whether British attendance will be at ministerial level.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are discussing with European Community partners and others the most appropriate forum in which to negotiate a convention. Further technical study of the feasibility of marking explosives must precede any such negotiation. The United Kingdom will continue to take a leading role.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to which countries apart from Czechoslovakia have the ability to manufacture and export Semtex and as to which of these countries takes either of these courses of action.

Mr. Waldegrave: As far as I am aware, Semtex is not produced in any country other than Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak authorities have stated publicly that they no longer export Semtex.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Net Overseas Assets

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the value of the United Kingdom's stock of net overseas assets at the end of 1988, based on the same method of assessment as that used in the calculation for 1987 in paragraph 3·29 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1988-89", and what are the reasons for the exclusion of any such figure from the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1989-90."

Mr. Lilley: Preliminary estimates of identified United Kingdom net overseas assets at the end of 1988 are made available by the CSO on request. The latest estimate is of the order of £115 billion to £120 billion. (The estimated level of identified net overseas assets at the end of 1987 has been revised up to just over £100 billion).

However, the method of assessment which is used by the CSO assumes that the balancing item does not reflect errors in the capital account. In practice, it is likely that a substantial part of the balancing item, which has totalled over £40 billion in the last three years taken together, reflects unidentified capital inflows, some of which will lead to an underrecording of United Kingdom external liabilities. The standard methodology is being reconsidered by the CSO. In view of this, an estimate of overseas assets was not included in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. An estimate of the value of the United Kingdom stock of net overseas assets will, however, be included as usual in the Pink Book in August.

Debt

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much debt there is to be repaid after the Budget repayment is concluded.

Mr. Lilley: The total of net public sector debt outstanding is forecast to be £157 billion (32 per cent. of GDP) at the end of 1988-89, a fall from £171 billion (38 per cent. of GDP) at the end of 1987-88.

On the assumption that the stock of debt falls by the £14 billion net debt repayment forecast for 1989-90, the outstanding stock of debt at the end of the year would be £143 billion.

Cheque Guarantee Cards

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received any representations concerning current expenditure limits on cheque guarantee cards; if he has any plans to ask the Office of Fair Trading to examine the operation by the banks of such limits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I have received no representations on the limits applicable to cheque guarantee cards. I am, however, advised that the Association for Payment Clearing Services, which is the responsible body, has yet to take a final position on the expenditure limit for cheque cards issued under the cheque guarantee card scheme, but that it is likely to do so in the near future. The current agreements between the banks and building societies concerning the standard cheque card scheme have, I understand, been furnished to the Director General of Fair Trading for examination in accordance with the requirements of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976. Individual banks are free to issue their own cheque guarantee cards providing for higher limits outside the scheme.

Privatisation

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the industries remaining in the state sector by the end of 1989 for which no firm plans have yet been announced to put in the private sector.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No privatisation proposals have yet been announced for the following nationalised industries:

British Railways Board
British Waterways Board
Civil Aviation Authority
London Regional Transport
Post Office

The Government have announced the intention to privatise British Coal in the next Parliament. The Government have also announced that work has been set in hand to study the possible options, including privatisation, for the future of British Rail.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Brooke: *(a)* None; *(b)* None.

Inflation and Consumer Credit

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further plans he has to tackle *(a)* inflation and *(b)* the expansion of consumer credit.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Interest rates will continue to be set to bear down on inflation. Interest rates are also the only effective means in an open economy of curbing consumer credit growth, if excessive.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Statistics

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the security statistics for 1988 are now available, together with details of persons charged with terrorist-type offences and convictions for scheduled offences for the year.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Yes, the statistics for 1988 are as follows (statistics for earlier years are contained in *Official Report* 7 March 1988, columns 67-74 inclusive):

Statistics on security (January-December 1988)

	Number
Part I—Statistics of terrorist activity	
Shooting incidents[1]	(179) 358
Explosions	253
Bombs neutralised	205
Weight of explosives in lbs[2]	8,717
Explosions neutralised	10,434
Armed robberies	653
Amount stolen (£)	1,388,600
Malicious fires	518
Deaths:	
Civilian	54
Army/UDR	33
RUC/RUC'R'	6
Injuries:	
Civilian	600
Army/UDR	229
RUC/RUC'R'	218
Part II—Statistics of security forces' activity	
Houses searched	3,442
Finds:	
Firearms	552
Ammunitions (rounds)	105,052
Explosives (lbs)	10,425
Persons charged with terrorist-type offences	
Murder	23
Attempted murder	46
Firearms offences	121
Explosives offences	29
Theft Act	42
Other	178
	439

Notes:

[1] Figures in ( ) refer to shots heard only and are not included in the total.

[2] Estimated weight only.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official*

Report to show how many *(a)* shotguns, *(b)* hand-guns and *(c)* air- and gas-powered weapons legally held in Northern Ireland are held for (i) sporting purposes, (ii) possession only and (iii) personal protection, or as much of such information as is available to him for each year since 1976 to the latest available date.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The approval for the holding of firearms for particular purposes is a matter for the chief constable, and it is not the practice to disclose details.

PRIME MINISTER

Chief Press Secretary

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what is the current grade of the chief press secretary and the salary attached to that grade.

The Prime Minister: The current grade of the chief press secretary is grade 3, which has a salary range, inclusive of discretionary points and London allowance, of £39,600 —£49,600.

10 Downing Street and Chequers (Works of Art)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will publish a table showing *(a)* the works of art, objects or artefacts currently on loan from national museums and galleries at (i) 10 Downing street and (ii) Chequers, *(b)* the museum or gallery from whose collections they are loaned and *(c)* the term of each loan.

The Prime Minister: Details of the paintings, reproductions and photographs at 10 Downing street were given in the *Official Report*, 29 October 1987 at columns *359-63*. The further information requested is only available at disproportionate cost.

CIVIL SERVICE

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, respectively, and overall in his Office are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Luce: The number of women and ethnic minorities in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 serving in the Cabinet Office is:

Grade	*Women*	*Percentage*	*Members of ethnic minorities*	*Percentage*
1	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0
3	1	6	0	0
4	0	0	0	0
5	8	15	1	2
6	8	29	0	0
7	41	22	1	1
Total	58	20	2	1

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when his Office last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The last survey was conducted in 1986. There are no plans to repeat it, but the ethnic origins of all new entrants to the department are monitored on a continuous basis.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep and Lambs

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what investigations he is making as to the causes of death of numbers of sheep and lambs in west Somerset and elsewhere; whether the injections of sheep by the vaccines Heptavac P and Ryvac 7P and the simultaneous use of an organo-phosphrous compound in sheep dips are safe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My officials are assessing all relevant information, including so far as is possible the husbandry, nutritional and medical history of the flocks where suspected adverse reactions have occurred, and results of post mortem examinations.

Vaccines such as Heptavac P and Ryvac 7P and organo-phosphrous sheep dips have both been very widely used in the national flock for many years without giving rise to any evidence that their use together is unsafe. Nevertheless, it is a point I have asked my officials to examine in the context of their investigations.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Donald Thompson: During the financial year 1988-89, my Department purchased 43 vehicles, at a total cost of £336,800. All vehicles were EC-made, but the number that were specifically British-made is not readily available, since many models are produced in more than one EC country.

Information about non-departmental public bodies for which I am responsible is not readily available.

Potato Marketing Board

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to make a statement regarding the future of the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Ryder: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 10 April at column *362*.

Receiverships

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms have gone into receivership during the last 12 months.

Mr. Maude: Statistics of receiverships are not analysed by trade. Figures are, however, available for bankruptcies

and company liquidations in England and Wales for agriculture and horticulture. The latest figures are for 1987, when there were 172 bankruptcies and 126 company insolvencies. These and related figures were published in an article on insolvencies on pages 32 and 33 of the British business dated 28 October 1988, which is available in the Library.

WALES

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to issue guidelines to local education authorities in Wales for the training of school governors in special educational needs, in order to help them fulfil their duties under the Education Act 1981; whether this is part of the programme he is promoting to encourage community care; if he will provide financial resourses to facilitate such training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: All local education authorities in Wales will receive education support grant for governor training in 1989-90. In submitting applications for grant LFAs were invited to detail their proposals for training courses. Some mentioned special educational needs specifically and my officials intend to monitor the position.

The Department's publication "School Governors: A Guide to the law" contains a chapter on governors' responsibility for pupils with special educational needs. Copies have been distributed to all school governors of county and controlled schools. A similar publication for special schools will be issued shortly.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to issue a circular to local education authorities in Wales on the implications of the Education Reform Act 1988 on the needs of children with special educational requirements under the Education Act 1981; what consultation he is having with local education authorities, voluntary organisations dealing with special education needs including Mencap in Wales and with education specialists in this area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office has issued a draft circular for consultation on assessment and statementing procedures under the Education Act 1981. It includes guidance on the implications of the Education Reform Act for pupils with special educational needs. A Welsh Office circular on the national curriculum and assessment will be issued shortly and will be followed by a guide for teachers. These will also contain references to special educational needs, as do the notes accompanying the Statutory Orders prescribing the attainment targets and programmes of study for mathematics and science in the curriculum. Welsh Office circular 36/88 contains guidance on provision for children with special educational needs in the arrangements for local management of schools. The Curriculum Council for Wales has decided to set up a committee to consider special educational needs in the curriculum. Mencap, as well as other bodies interested in special educational needs have been included in the consultations to date.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish procedures for monitoring the situation in mainstream schools to ensure that at least one, and preferably two, governors have a specific interest in, and knowledge of, special educational needs, in line with the proposals of the Warnock report.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Under the 1981 Education Act, every school must have a "responsible person" who ensures that all who are likely to teach a pupil are told that he has a statement of special educational needs. This person may be the head, the chairman of governors or another governor. We have no plans to change these requirements.

Water Quality

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list all water supplies in Wales that are in breach of the European Economic Community directive on water quality in respect of safety limits on lead in drinking water; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list all water supplies in Wales in breach of the European Economic Community directive on water quality in respect of safety limits in lead in drinking water; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The most recent information relates to February 1989 when the following supplies failed to comply with the requirements of the EC drinking water directive in respect of lead:

Eithin Fynydd
Talybont
Dyffryn
Cilfor
Rhyd-Ddu
Penystryd
Dinas Mawddwy
Abergynolwen
Rhyd
Penmaenmawr
Aber
Capel Curig
Rhydymaen
Brithdir
Braich y Rhiw
Croesor
Glanllwyd
Cwmpedol
Taicynhaeaf
Abertrinant
Glascoed/Trecastle
Cilcain/Alwen
St. David's (Brecon)
Llanfrynach
Lampeter Olwen
Capel Dewi
Bontgoch
Garw
Parc Gwyn
Abermagwr
Preseli
Pwllfa/Craig
Bryngwyn
Bychau
Nantymoel

The Welsh water authority has confirmed that all necessary remedial action will be completed by December 1989.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital beds there were by specialty in 1979 and in 1988.

Mr. Grist: Information on the numbers of hospital beds is published annually in "Bed Use Statistics", copies of which are in the Library of the House. The latest edition is for the year ending March 1988.

Health Service (Waiting Lists)

Mrs. Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of people on waiting lists for each type of operation in each health district in Wales and the number who have been waiting for over six months, one year, two years, three years or more for each type of operation in each health district in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not available centrally. However, hospital waiting list bulletins,

published bi-annually, provide waiting list statistics for individual specialties and for individual hospitals. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what representations he has received on the effect of the uncertainty over the present and second Severn crossing on decisions on the possible location of new heavy industry in Wales;

(2) if he will publish an assessment of the effects of the uncertainty over the present Severn road crossing and future crossings on decisions on the locations of new heavy industry in south Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There is no uncertainty over the present and second Severn road crossings.

Water

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide details of the amount spent by Welsh Water on advertising and publicity since 1 January.

Mr. Grist: This is a matter for the Welsh Water Authority. I suggest that the hon. Lady writes to the chairman of the authority direct.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to improve any of the trunk roads leading into Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Improvement of the A44 between Capel Bangor and Penllwyn is planned within the next five years.

Investment

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if, pursuant to his answer of 11 April, *Official Report*, column *480*, he will give details of what records are kept relating to inquiries of WINvest; and what indicators he considers useful in assessing the level of interest in Wales as a location for investment.

Mr. Peter Walker: Inquiries to WINvest are recorded at the time of receipt but comprehensive records are not maintained for the reason I gave the hon. Gentleman on 11 April at column *480*.

A more useful indicator of the levels of interest being shown in Wales as a location for investment is the number of companies actually visiting Wales for the first time. There were 246 such visits in 1987, 241 in 1988 and 76 in the first quarter of 1989.

M4

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will now, in view of the worsening of congestion along Baglan road, Port Talbot, accelerate the start of the work on the Baglan-Lonlas part of the M4.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Earlswood-Lonlas section of the motorway is planned to start in January 1990. Advancing the Baglan-Earlswood contracts would be at the expense of other schemes, including those on the A55. The Baglan-Lonlas scheme is expected to be completed by mid 1994.

Work will start shortly on a scheme to relieve delays at the M4 Baglan junction. This will give greater priority to M4 westbound traffic.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when work commenced on the last part of the M4 to be completed; and why there has been a delay in the start of the Baglan-Lonlas road.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Work on the Bridgend northern by-pass started in 1978. Given that the A48 already provides Baglan-Lonlas with a dual carriageway link to the M4 the decision was taken to give priority to the A55. Baglan-Lonlas will have higher priority as expenditure on the A55 starts to fall.

Health Service

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those occasions on which his Department has made direct contributions to voluntary appeals for financial assistance towards expenditure on items for use in the National Health Service in Wales since 1979; and what sums were involved in each case.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* There have been no such contributions as far as I am aware.

Deeside Waterfront Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the Deeside waterfront scheme; if he will visit and meet Alyn and Deeside district council to discuss the waterfront project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Alyn and Deeside district council have referred the planning applications for this scheme to me. I have decided that the practical implications of this scheme, which is clearly of major significance to north-east Wales, should be thoroughly assessed at a public local inquiry and I have today called-in the applications for determination. In these circumstances a meeting with the council would be inappropriate.

ENERGY

Coal Imports

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the regional distribution of the final destination of coal imports from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This information is not available.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the type of Government subsidy and the approximate subsidy per tonne of the coals imported into Britain from *(a)* Australia, *(b)* Poland, *(c)* the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, *(d)* South Africa and *(e)* Latin American countries; if he will list comparable information on subsidies to British coal exports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government give no specific subsidies to support exports of British coal. We have no evidence of such subsidies in the countries listed.

Director General of Electricity Supply (Staff)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the present position in regard to the staffing of the offices of the proposed Director General of Electricity Supply; and by what date he anticipates that provisional appointments will be made.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Planning for the establishment of the Office of Electricity Regulation (OFFER) is under way. It is hoped that a suitable candidate for the post of Director General of Electricity Supply (DGES) will be identified in time for him or her to participate in the process of setting up OFFER. To this end, a firm of selection consultants has been appointed to assist my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in finding a suitable candidate. Formal appointments to OFFER will take place after enactment of the Electricity Bill currently before Parliament.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* British Coal, *(c)* the electricity industry and *(d)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Parkinson: The answers are:

(a) None.

(b) and *(c)* Purchases by British Coal, the electricity industry and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority are matters for the industries themselves. I have asked the respective chairmen to write to the hon. Member.

(d) The Oil and Pipelines Agency, for which I was then responsible, bought one vehicle; it was non-British and cost £13,277.

North Sea Oil Spills (Equipment)

Mr. Bevan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what type of oil spill containment and treatment equipment is available, and within what time span, for any spills or seepages that may occur near the North Sea oil platforms and depots.

Mr. Parkinson: Stocks of oil spill containment and treatment equipment are held by the oil industry, in accordance with their contingency plans, and Government. All standby vessels around offshore oil installations carry spraying equipment and dispersants. These vessels are required to be within five nautical miles of the installation. Dispersants and spraying equipment, for use in aircraft and larger vessels, are based at strategic locations around the coast. Inflatable booms and skimmer systems for containment and recovery of oil from the sea surface are also available.

The response strategy employed largely depends on the size and nature of the spill and its location, but it is expected that, where necessary, oil companies will respond quickly enough to prevent damage to the environment. Specifically, for spills of oil from platforms in near shore areas, operators are required to be able to mount an initial response within 30 minutes using treatment equipment held on the standby vessel. Back-up resources must then be made available within half the minimum time predicted for oil to reach the beach.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vietnamese Boat People

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Vietnamese boat people have been permitted to become residents in the United Kingdom during the last 12 months for which figures are available; and how many of these came via refugee camps in Hong Kong.

Mr. Renton: The total number of south-east Asian refugees accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in 1988 is published in table 3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin 10/89 "Control of Immigration Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1988", a copy of which is in the Library. Of these, 205 came from Hong Kong. No further breakdown by nationality is available.

Hong Kong Citizens

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many citizens of Hong Kong were permitted to become resident in the United Kingdom during the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what were the categories of reasons for these permissions.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is given in the following table:

Acceptances for settlement in 1988 of British Dependent Territory Citizens from Hong Kong by category of acceptance

Acceptances	*Number*
Completed four years in approved employment	160
Completed four years in permit-free employment	20
Husbands	160
Wives	320
Children	170
Other	320
Total acceptances	1,150

Attempted Murder Statistics

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons convicted of attempted murder left prison in each of the last five years; and what was the average length of detention in each year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost because of the large number of cases that would require checking. The readily available information relates to the length of sentence imposed and is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", supplementary tables vol. 2 (tables S2.3 and S2.4 of the issue for 1987, Cm. 498). Copies are held in the Library.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals are

currently serving sentences for attempted murder in United Kingdom prisons; and what is their average length of sentence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is estimated that on 31 December 1988 about 13 non-British citizens were serving sentences in prison service establishments in England and Wales for attempted murder. About half of them were serving life sentences. The lengths of sentence of those serving determinate sentences varied from under one year up to 30 years; their average sentence was about 14 years.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there is any facility on the police national computer to distinguish between spent and unspent convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There is at present no facility available on the police national computer to distinguish between convictions which are spent or unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. This is, however, one of the facilities being considered for implementation on the police national computer in due course.

Firearms Consultative Committee

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to consult the Firearms Consultative Committee before publishing security arrangements under the firearms legislation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Advice on safe-keeping arrangements for firearms and shot guns will be contained in new guidance to the police on the administration of the firearms legislation. This will be issued, and made publicly available, at the end of May, in readiness for the introduction of the remaining provisions of the Act, and new rules, in the summer. There has been extensive consultation on the guidance with shooting and other interests. I regard it as important to have the Firearms Consultative Committee in place as soon as possible but the implementation of the new provisions cannot await consultation with the committee. It will, however, be open to the committee to keep under review and make recommendations on the administration and enforcement of the safe-keeping requirements.

Police Cars (Accidents)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the availability of compensation for the families of pedestrians killed by police cars pursuing other vehicles.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The position in respect of compensation for injury, loss of life or damage to property following a road accident involving a police vehicle is in general the same as following any other road accident. Any compensation or other payments would normally be dealt with under insurance cover arrangements.

Libyan Citizens

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Libyan citizens are: *(a)* currently serving sentences and *(b)* awaiting sentencing in United Kingdom prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The nationality of remand prisoners is not recorded centrally. On 31 December 1988 the latest date for which information is readily available, central records show seven Libyan citizens serving sentences in prison service establishments in England and Wales.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times a body belt has been used on an inmate in prison in England and Wales in each of the last three years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales 1988" (table 10·2 of the latest issue, for 1987, Cm 547), copies of which are held in the Library.

Firearms Act 1988

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters he has received to date about the Firearms Act 1988 *(a)* from when his proposals were first published until First Reading, *(b)* between First Reading and Royal Assent and *(c)* since Royal Assent until the latest available date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is not kept in the precise form requested but figures compiled on a monthly basis from September 1987, when I announced our proposals, to March 1989 are as follows:

	Number
1987	
September	819
October	904
November	962
December	407
1988	
January	907
February	653
March	373
April	173
May	131
June	113
July	54
August	77
September	50
October	105
November	55
December	36
1989	
January	89
February	120
March	78

Missing Persons

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make it his policy to comply with the recommendation of the Association of Chief Police Officers to create a national register for missing persons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has now received the association's report. They have requested that he consult the Central Conference of Chief Constables on its recommendations. This he is now doing.

Mrs. Robina Kausar

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when papers were referred to him concerning an entry clearance application made by Mrs. Robina Kausar at the post in Islamabad; when it was discovered these papers had been lost and a duplicate referral requested from the post; when Mrs. Kausar's husband in the United Kingdom was interviewed; when a decision is to be taken on this application made at Islamabad on 24 August 1987; when he received the copy of a letter from the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) to the hon. Member for Bradford, West, dated 5 December 1988 concerning the case, stating it was to be treated with priority.

Mr. Renton: Mrs. Kausar's entry clearance application to join her husband, Mr. Muhammed Nazir, for settlement was referred to the immigration and nationality department on 12 January 1988 because documents submitted by the sponsor appeared to have been altered. At no time were any of the papers connected with this case mislaid, and I am sorry that the hon. Member was misinformed on this point.

Owing to the large backlog of work in the Department, the application was not however considered until 21 November. I received a copy of the letter dated 5 December 1988 sent by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the hon. Member for Bradford, West on 12 December, by which time we had begun our inquiries into the employment aspects of the application. These were necessary after it was confirmed that Mr. Nazir had furnished forged documents in support of the maintenance requirements of the immigration rules.

It was not felt necessary to interview Mr. Nazir as our outstanding inquiries could more easily be answered by correspondence with the employer and solicitor. A decision to authorise settlement entry clearance was taken on 10 April immediately following receipt of a satisfactory reply on the employment aspect. Notification has been sent accordingly to the entry clearance officer in Islamabad who will contact Mrs. Kausar once it has been received.

Cigarettes Sales

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to take any further steps to enforce section 1 of the Protection of Children (Tobacco) Act 1986 in relation to the sale of individual cigarettes to young people under the age of 16 years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Enforcement of the law on the sale of cigarettes to persons under the age of 16 is an operational matter for the chief officer of the police force concerned. If the hon. Member is aware of any general problem in the enforcement of the legislation, perhaps he would let us have the details.

Fine Defaulters

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial provision is made by the prison department for persons released from custody following their imprisonment for fine default.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* Persons released from custody following imprisonment in default of payment of a fine receive a subsistence allowance to cover the period until they can reach an office of the Department of Social Security and a travel warrant or payment in cash for fares to their home address or destination.

Probation Service

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what were the findings of the Audit Commission inquiry into the workings of the probation service; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action his Department will be taking following receipt of the Audit Commission report entitled "The Probation Service, Promoting Value for Money".

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* The Audit Commission found that well planned and targeted probation work can be effective, and that there is an important role for the probation service to play in providing the courts with more commuity-based services. But the Audit Commission calls for several improvements, which have to be made before the probation service can do this: supervising offenders more effectively; focusing activities more sharply on serious offenders; better research and evaluation of effectiveness; closer collaboration with the courts and other agencies; and improving management systems.

I welcome the report. Further action on its important recommendations will be closely linked to action on the proposals set out in the Green Paper "Punishment, Custody and the Community", and the programme of work set out in part 2 of the Green Paper (and in "Tackling Offending: an Action Plan") is already in hand. Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation will be collaborating with the Audit Commission in a series of "value for money" audits in probation areas throughout England and Wales, starting in 1990.

Parole

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in England and Wales received notification of their actual parole date after the passing of their parole eligibility date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* Accurate statistics of the number of cases where inmates have been notified of the outcome of their parole review after their parole eligibility date will not be available until a new computer system is operational. In 1988, about 6,100 parole dossiers were delayed beyond this target.

Bookshops (Arson Attacks)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to what urgent action is being taken in the light of the recent arson attacks on bookshops; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that two attacks on London bookshops are at present being investigated. No conclusions can be drawn until the inquiries are complete.

DNA Testing

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the introduction of DNA testing for the purposes of the immigration rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 13 April 1989 at column 1046 and to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollock (Mr. Dunnachie) on 10 April 1989 at column 321.

Mr. Bidwell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give figures of numbers of cases requiring new consideration in the light of DNA blood tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* As DNA evidence can be produced at any stage of the entry clearance process, it is not readily possible to quantify the number of cases involved. A substantial number of applications and appeals have been resolved on the basis of DNA evidence which established the relevant relationships. A number of cases involving reapplicants who no longer qualify for admission have been deferred pending my right hon. Friend's decision on whether and in what circumstances to exercise his discretion outside the rules.

Tamil Refugees

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of Tamils from Sri Lanka who have been given refugee status in the United Kingdom in the last three years.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* Statistics are not kept on the number of refugees who belong to specific ethnic groups. The numbers of Sri Lankans granted asylum in the last three years are as follows:

	Number
1986	4
1987	6
1988	[1]9

[1] provisional.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement explaining the reasons for awarding the contract for the police national computer to Siemens.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* The hardware for the replacement police national computer was the subject of an open competition which was won by Siemens plc because its proposal offered best value for money.

Special Constables

Mr Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many special constables are employed as security guards.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* Information is not held centrally on the private occupations of special constables appointed by chief constables under section 16 of the Police Act 1964. Special constables appointed under other legislation are not a matter for my right hon. Friend, although we are aware of one case where employees of a security firm were provided under contract to the owners of a port and sworn in as special constables by the local justices.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Prosecution Witnesses

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has on contacts between prosecution witnesses in the case of Hosni E. Farhat and Ahmed Gaddafi Aidain of Libya; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: None.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on his policy towards the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950 in the light of the decision of Mr. Justice Warner to adjourn applications for injunctions brought on behalf of local authorities to restrain various do-it-yourself stores from Sunday trading.

The Attorney-General: Enforcement of the Shops Act 1950 is, by virtue of section 71 of that Act, the duty of the local authorities, which have the necessary powers. In my view, the possibility that provisions of any part of any Act may at a future date be held by the European Court of Justice to be incompatible with the United Kingdom's obligations under the treaty of Rome is irrelevant to the question of statutory responsibility for enforcement of such an Act. I accordingly consider that such responsibility in respect of the Shops Act is unaffected by article 177 references that have been made in certain cases, and that accordingly local authorities remain subject to their duty to enforce the Act.

The decision of Mr. Justice Warner was given in January in a case brought by the King's Lynn, Chester and Worcester local authorities. I understand they were seeking summary judgment on their applications for final injunctions against certain DIY stores. Mr. Justice Warner adjourned the applications on the ground, I understand, that the outcome of the references to the European Court of Justice in other cases would establish whether the defendants had an arguable case or not.

The learned judge's decision in my view does not conflict with the opinion I have here expressed as to responsibility for enforcement of the Shops Act.

The proceedings were unusual in that the local authority was seeking to show that the shops had no arguable case and that the authority should therefore have a final injunction immediately. The learned judge, in his discretion, thought this was premature. But, as I understand he was at pains to point out, it remains open to local authorities in England and Wales to seek interlocutory injunctions to restrain Sunday trading: nor does the decision have any bearing on discretionary considerations in the conduct of prosecutions.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide for the latest available 12 month period *(a)*

the number of Queen's counsel excluding Treasury counsel, *(b)* the amount of total public money received by Queen's counsel, *(c)* the number of cases dealt with by Queen's counsel, *(e)* the number of cases prosecuted by Queen's counsel, *(f)* the average fee, brief and refreshers, in prosecution cases, *(g)* the number of criminal cases defended by Queen's counsel where payment was made from public funds, *(h)* the average fee for defence counsel, brief and refreshers, in criminal cases where payment was made from public funds, *(i)* the duration of average criminal case in which Queen's counsel appeared and *(j)* the average income of Queen's counsel from public funds; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General *(holding answer 23 March 1989)*: There are currently 673 Queen's counsel. In 1987-88, the average brief fee for a trial in the Crown court payable to Queen's counsel representing legally aided defendants was £3,273·20 and the average full day refresher was £271·30. The number of criminal cases defended by Queen's counsel where payment was made from public funds was around 1,440. The other information requested by the hon. Member is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Junior Counsel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney General if he will provide for the latest available 12 month period in respect of the Crown court *(a)* the total amount of public money received by junior counsel, *(b)* the number of cases dealt with by junior counsel, *(c)* the number of cases prosecuted by junior counsel, *(d)* the average fee, brief and refreshers, in prosecution cases prosecuted by junior counsel, *(e)* the number of criminal cases defended by junior counsel where payment was made from public funds and *(f)* the average fee for defence counsel, brief and refreshers, in criminal cases where payment was made from public funds; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General *(holding answer 23 March 1989)*: On 1987-88, the average brief fee for a trial in the Crown court payable to junior counsel representing legally aided defendants was £557·90, and the average full day refresher was £136. The number of cases defended by junior counsel where payment was made from public funds was around 94,030. The other information requested by the hon. Member is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide for the latest available 12-month period, the duration of average criminal case in which junior counsel appeared, in days, the average income of junior counsel from public funds in respect of the magistrates' courts *(a)* the amount of total public money received by junior counsel, *(b)* the number of cases dealt with by junior counsel, *(c)* the number of cases prosecuted by junior counsel, *(d)* the average fee, brief and refreshers, in prosecution cases prosecuted by junior counsel, *(e)* the number of criminal cases defended by junior counsel where payment was made from public funds, *(f)* the average fee for defence counsel, brief and refreshers, in criminal cases where payment was made from public funds, *(g)* the duration of average criminal case in which junior counsel appeared, in hours, and *(h)* the average income of junior counsel from public funds; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 23 March 1989]*: The information requested by the hon. Member is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Solicitors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide for the latest available 12-month period (a) the number of solicitors regularly practising in firms offering legal services to the public, *(b)* the number of solicitors regularly practising in the criminal courts, *(c)* the number of solicitors' firms on the criminal legal aid panel and *(d)* the number of solicitors firms on a duty solicitor scheme for police stations; in respect of the Crown courts, what is (i) the amount of total public money received by solicitors retained to defend and (ii) the number of cases in which publicly funded solicitors instructed counsel to defend; in respect of criminal cases in the magistrates' courts, what is (1) the amount of total public money received by solicitors, (2) the number of cases dealt with by solicitors, including those where junior counsel was instructed, (3) the average cost of publicly funded defence cases, and (4) the duration of average criminal cases in hours, in respect of 24 hour duty solicitor schemes, what is (A) the number of visits made to police stations, (B) the duration of the average visit, (C) the total cost and (D) the average cost; and in respect of court based duty solicitor schemes, what is (a1) the number of defendants represented, (a2) the total cost and (a3) the average cost per defendant; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 23 March 1989]*: There are currently 50,494 solicitors in England and Wales with practising certificates. In 1987-88, 405,000 payments were made out of the legal aid fund in respect of criminal cases in the magistrates' courts at an average cost of £281·21 per case. In 1987-88, 170,655 visits were made to police stations under the 24-hour duty solicitor scheme and the total cost of the scheme was £23·2 million, at an average cost per suspect of £85·38. In 1987-88, 99,864 defendants were represented under the magistrates courts duty solicitor scheme and the total cost of the scheme was £4·8 million, at an average cost per defendant of £28·88. The other information requested by the hon. Member is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Test Ban

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the issue of the verification of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty was last discussed by a meeting of NATO defence ministers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The details of what is discussed at meetings of NATO's Defence Ministers are confidential but NATO's Defence Ministers are briefed regularly on nuclear arms control matters, including nuclear testing.

RAF (Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times in the last 10 years security has been tested and evaluated at *(a)* RAF Finningley and *(b)*

840 Signal Unit, Lindholme, for both (i) civilian and (ii) service personnel; and if he will make a statement on the results.

Mr. Neubert: Security arrangements at all RAF stations are tested frequently, but for obvious reasons it would not be in the public interest to reveal details of those evaluations or their results.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for the last two years the number of *(a)* movements at and *(b)* personnel of the armed services who have used RAF Finningley; how many times civilian aircraft were used; and what types of aircraft were so deployed.

Mr. Neubert: Since RAF Finningley's task is flying training rather than air transport, aggregated records of military movements are not kept, nor do service personnel normally use the station as an airhead. There were 69 civil aircraft movements at RAF Finningley in 1987 and 25 in 1988, almost entirely by air taxi and light executive aircraft, including air ambulance flights.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations and date of deployments of the Skyguard radar system in Yorkshire.

Mr. Neubert: The Skyguard radar system has not been deployed in a low flying monitoring role in Yorkshire.

Disarmament

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many nuclear warheads assigned to NATO control have been withdrawn from deployment since April; what types of warhead they were; what has been done with the nuclear material recovered from the warheads; and whether the withdrawals were under multilateral or bilateral agreements or by unilateral decision;

(2) how many nuclear warheads were deployed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and in what countries, in April 1959, 1969, 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1979, NATO Defence Ministers agreed to reduce by 1,000 the number of NATO nuclear warheads stockpiled in Europe. In 1983, at their meeting in Montebello, the Ministers decided to reduce the stockpile by a further 1,400 warheads. Those two actions together have resulted in bringing the NATO nuclear stockpile in Europe to its lowest level for more than 20 years. The level is being further reduced as warheads are removed in association with the implementation of the INF treaty. All the 2,400 warheads removed were the property of the United States Government; the disposal of the nuclear materials contained in them is therefore a matter for the United States Government. Details of the types and location of NATO's nuclear warheads in Europe are classified, but the number of NATO LRINF and SRINF systems with nuclear-capable variants is set out in figures 18 and 19 of volume 1 of the Statement on Defence Estimates 1988 (Cm 344-I).

Low Flying

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will identify the type of aircraft and operating bases of the military jets which made low-level flights over East Linton at 4.30 pm on 21 March and at 2.25 pm on 29 March; and if he will make a statement on the speed and height of those flights.

Mr. Neubert: United Kingdom and other military aircraft are authorised as a matter of routine to carry out low-level flying training in the area mentioned at heights no lower than 250 ft and at speeds normally not exceeding 450 knots. Aircraft may originate from a number of flying stations in both the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the large uninhabited areas of the world used for low-level flight training referred to in his Department's current advertising campaign for the recruitment of Royal Air Force officers.

Mr. Neubert: The RAF flying training at altitudes under 250 ft, which is needed to refine aircrew skills, is mainly undertaken in virtually unpopulated parts of the United States and Canada.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the installation of transponder equipment on military aircraft which will provide warning directly to the pilots of other aircraft flying at low level of the presence of conflicting air traffic.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 25 January 1989]:* The Ministry of Defence has placed a small contract for a study into the feasibility of giving military aircraft collision warning facilities in order to give early warning of conflicting military traffic, in particular, by utilising existing transponder equipment.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he intends to inform the general public of Her Majesty's Government's commitment to the Falkland Islands garrison and its upkeep since 1981; what future reviews are planned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Government policy on the defence of the Falkland Islands has been set out in successive statements on the Defence Estimates. The maintenance of a garrison continues to be necessary in support of the Falkland islanders' right to live in peace and security under a Government of their choosing. The adequacy of that garrison to fulfil its task is kept under constant review.

Tucano Aircraft

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tucano aircraft, to the full specification, have so far been delivered to the Royal Air Force for training use; and how many were due to be delivered by this time under the terms of the original contract.

Mr. Sainsbury: Fourteen aircraft have been delivered to the RAF; 59 aircraft should have been delivered by now, under the terms of the contract signed on 30 April 1985.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many vehicles and at what value were

purchased by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Sainsbury: In 1987-88, the most recent year for which full information is currently available, some 8,200 logistic vehicles, ranging from small vans and cars to heavy trucks, were purchased by the Ministry of Defence at a total cost of £180 million. Apart from 258 bought at a cost of £1·5 million, all of these vehicles were UK-produced in accordance with the definition employed by the Department of Trade and Industry for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as UK-produced if the UK content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value. No vehicles were purchased by the Ministry of Defence for other public sector agencies.

Employment Law

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those provisions of employment law which do not apply to members of the forces.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The terms of service of members of the armed forces are governed by service law and regulations. The extent to which the provisions of civil employment legislation apply to the Crown in general and to the armed forces in particular is set out where appropriate in the legislation itself. Many of the most significant of such provisions are contained in the Employment Protection Act 1975 and the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978; I refer the right hon. Gentleman especially to sections 121 and 138 respectively, which state that those Acts do not apply to service as a member of the naval, military or air forces of the Crown.

ENVIRONMENT

Cricket

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to meet Mr. Ted Dexter; and if he will make a statement on the future of British cricket.

Mr. Moynihan: I have no present plans to do so. If Mr. Dexter would like a meeting, I would be happy to see him. I wish everyone involved with English cricket a very successful season.

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information his Department has on the level of registration and non-registration for the poll tax in *(a)* England and *(b)* Nottingham;

(2) if he will make a statement on progress on registration for the poll tax in England.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. As far as the community charge is concerned, the hon. Member really cannot seriously expect any information on levels of registration before registration officers have even started to compile their registers. Registration officers have until the end of November 1989 to complete their initial registers.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates his Department has made of the costs of collecting the poll tax compared with collecting the rates in *(a)* Nottingham and *(b)* England as a whole.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax.

We estimate that the cost of collecting community charges in England and Wales would be approximately twice the cost of collecting rates, since there will be twice as many chargepayers as there are now ratepayers. The two tax alternatives proposed by Labour would, of course, cost significantly more than either rates or the community charge to collect.

We have made no estimate of the collection costs for any individual charging authority.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what a ward sister would pay *(a)* in poll tax and *(b)* in rates if she lived in (i) a typical one-bedroom flat and (ii) a typical two-bedroomed house in Nottingham.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. Based on 1988-89 figures, a ward sister living in a flat or house of average rateable value in Nottingham would pay a rates bill of around £430. This compares with the illustrative community charge figure of £251 (with no safety net) or £231 (with the safety net).

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 local authorities on current estimates which will levy *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest level of poll tax; giving the political control in each authority.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. Illustrative community charges for 1988-89 were published on 23 June 1988 and placed in the Library.

Based on these figures, the 10 highest ranking areas are Camden, Tower Hamlets, Greenwich, Hackney, Lewisham, Southwark, Lambeth, Islington, City of London and Hammersmith and Fulham. All are Labour-controlled London boroughs, with the exception of the City, which is independent. The community charge in all ten reflects spending by the Labour-controlled Inner London education authority.

The 10 lowest ranking areas are Isles of Scilly (independent), Runnymede (Conservative), Purbeck (no overall control), Rochester upon Medway (Conservative), Redbridge (Conservative), North Dorset (independent), West Dorset (independent), Hereford (Liberal), Poole (Conservative) and South Herefordshire (independent).

The county councils providing services in these areas —Kent (Rochester and Medway), Dorset (Purbeck, North and West Dorset), Surrey (Runneymede), Herefordshire (Hereford, South Herefordshire)—are all under Conservative control.

No Labour-controlled authority figures in any way among the low spenders whereas, with one exception, all the high spenders are Labour-controlled.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list numbers and sources of representations on the poll tax which he has received from individuals and organisations in Nottingham.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. Correspondence on the community charge is not recorded within my Department according to the local government area from which it is received.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for publicity on registration for the community charge in the period before 22 May, including *(a)* the timing, coverage and cost of any newspaper advertisements, *(b)* the timing and cost of any hoarding advertisements, *(c)* proposed methods of distribution, timing and cost of any leaflets, *(d)* the use of broadcast media and the timing and cost, and *(e)* the timing and cost of any promotional tours, breakfast, meetings, and exhibitions involving Ministers in his Department.

Mr. Ridley: When details of the complete package are finalised, I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will commission research to establish the proportion of the increase or decrease of those registering to vote *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* in England and Wales as a result of the poll tax and its registration powers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to do so. The register of electors and the community charges register are different registers, separately compiled, and we do not think that research of the kind suggested would be profitable even if it were feasible.

Footpaths

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the speed with which correspondence between Department of Environment offices in Bristol concerning footpaths and the Secretary of the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society has been dealt; and whether he has any plans to increase the number of officials dealing with footpaths and public rights of way.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Every effort is made to deal with all correspondence as quickly as possible, the resources necessary to deal with work on public rights of way are kept under review. There has been a substantial reduction in the time taken to decide opposed rights of way orders even though workload is increasing.

Countryside Task Force

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the Countryside Commission position statement "Working for the Countryside" and, in particular, on its ideas for a countryside task force.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Countryside Commission issued its position statement "Working for the Countryside" on 31 March to mark the conclusion of the community programme. The statement recognises the value of the contribution made to environmental work by the CP and puts forward suggestions for bridging the gap between CP and the smaller environmental and countryside work component of the employment training programme. I welcome the Commission's efforts with the Training Agency to encourage as many countryside bodies as possible to use the new scheme as effectively as some have already done. The commission's thinking on its longer-term concept of a national countryside task force is as yet only at a preliminary stage. I have asked the commission to work up the details so we can take a considered view of it.

Cryptosporidia

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities and research centres undertaking research into the incidence of cryptosporidia in water, with an indication of the resources available to them in terms of *(a)* staff, *(b)* government financial support, *(c)* other public sector finance and *(d)* other sources of financing.

Mr. Howard: This information is not held centrally. However, the expert group on cryptosporidium in water supplies which was announced in my reply of 2 March, column 286, will be examining the occurrence and extent of cryptosporidia in water supplies and the need for further research.

Sewage Works (North Derbyshire)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any proposals to relax quality controls for sewage works at Ashover, Clay Cross and Kelstedge in the North Derbyshire district of the Seven-Trent water authority.

Mr. Howard: I have received an application for a time limited consent variation in respect of the Clay Cross sewage treatment works. No such applications have been received in respect of the sewage treatment works at either Ashover or Kelstedge.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* water authorities, *(c)* local authorities and *(d)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Ridley: The Crown Suppliers (a trading fund account of the Property Services Agency), operate a self-drive vehicle contract hire service, providing vehicles to a number of Government Departments and public sector organisations.

During 1988, the Crown Suppliers purchased 1,007 vehicles at a total cost of £7,538,640.

Five hundred and fifty seven vehicles were United Kingdom-produced, on the definition employed by the DTI for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom-produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value. The remainder (with the exception of one vehicle) were manufactured within the EEC.

Details of vehicle purchased by water authorities, local authorities and other public sector agencies are not the responsibility of my Department.

House of Commons (Terrace Pavilion)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will identify all the costs associated with the erection of the Terrace Pavilion of the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Chope: The costs of the Terrace awning which are being carried on my Department's Vote are approximately £35,000. The balance of the total cost of about £150,000 is being paid by the House of Commons Refreshment Department.

Water Bill (Leaflets)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the cost to his Department of printing the Water Bill series of leaflets, launched on 10 April.

Mr. Howard: Two leaflets have been produced so far, at a total cost of just under £3,000.

Water Authorities (Advertising)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide details of the amount spent on advertising and publicity by each water authority since 1 January.

Mr. Howard: This is a matter for the authorities.

Flood Alerts (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications for flood alerts in those London boroughs opting not to be part of the tidal flood warning system; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for the London boroughs, which have the necessary powers under section 138 of the Local Government Act 1972, to determine whether the risk of flooding justifies maintaining the siren warning system or taking other action.

London Residuary Body (Assets)

Mr. Tony Banks To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what safeguards exist to ensure that London ratepayers receive the best possible price for public assets disposed of by the London residuary body.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomleyy: Paragraph 7 (2) of schedule 13 to the Local Government Act 1985 subjects the London residuary body to section 123 (2) of the Local Government Act 1972, which requires the LRB to obtain the Secretary of State's consent to any disposal of land not required for carrying out its functions for less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable. Section 79 of the 1985 Act provides that the LRB is audited in accordance with the provisions of part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which properties have been the subject of discussion between his Department and the London residuary body prior to their disposal.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The disposal of a wide range of the LRB's property portfolio has been the subject of discussion as the need has arisen.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that records are made publicly available in respect of the price paid and the names of the new owners of former publicly-owned assets sold by the London residuary body; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Waste Management (Greater London)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the report commissioned from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on arrangements for waste management in Greater London and the former metropolitan county areas is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The report is being published today and copies have been placed in the Library. The report has concluded that the local authorities in the relevant areas are working together effectively under statutory and voluntary arrangements to achieve generally acceptable operating standards, although some areas of possible improvement have been identified.

I have decided, therefore, that no new arrangements are required under section 10(2) of the Local Government Act 1985, but I have instructed Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to pursue its recommendations for improvements in performance directly with the local authorities concerned.

Anti-competitive Practices

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many anti-competitive practices have been referred to him under the Local Government Act 1988; how many involve the refusal of the use of an authority's depot; and how many times he has exercised his powers under the Act.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* The Department has received approximately 80 complaints about a wide range of alleged anti-competitive practices adopted by local authorities under the Local Government Act 1988. About half of these complaints concern the alleged refusal by authorities to make their depots available to contractors. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not yet exercised his sanction powers under part I of the 1988 Act, but a number of authorities have decided to modify their practice after approaches by the Department and other cases are not yet closed. Under similar new powers in section 19A of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, however, he has served a notice on one authority for alleged anti-competitive behaviour in the award of building and maintenance work.

Green Belt

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Uxbridge concerning the London Green Belt Estate on 8 March, *Official Report*, column *524*, *(a)* whether he has to give his consent to the disposal of any title and *(b)* if he will indicate what is his policy towards the use of his reserve powers under the Green Belt (London and Home

Counties) Act 1938 about which he gave assurance at the time of the abolition of the former Greater London Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 10 April 1989]*: A High Court judgment of March 1988 established that section 5 of the 1938 Act continues to require local authorities to obtain the consent of my right hon. Friend for the disposal of land held under that Act notwithstanding that other legislation also applies to the sale. In determining applications under the 1938 Act, my right hon. Friend's primary concern, in line with the assurances given in 1984 and 1985, is to ensure that the land concerned continues to fulfil the objectives both of the 1938 Act and of green belt policy as set out in planning policy guidance note 2.

Stocken Hall, Rutland

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will list the steps taken by the Property Services Agency to carry out the instructions of his predecessor, following the public inquiry on 7 October 1980, to find a purchaser to renovate Stocken hall, Rutland, as described in a ministerial letter by the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) why his Department, when instructing Messrs. Cluttons to offer Stocken hall for sale, permitted the published offer for sale document to state that the sale would be on the basis that the building should be renovated; at what stage his Department established that such a condition was unenforceable; why the sale was permitted to proceed on such a basis; and what steps were taken by his Department to seek a voluntary contractual agreement with the purchasers which would implement the decision in favour of renovation already taken by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 12 April 1989]*: I will write to my hon. Friend about this case.

Air Pollution

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to improve stricter regulations on the removal of substances other than lead from exhaust emissions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Strict regulation of emissions of the exhaust gases and particulates from motor vehicles was agreed by European Community Environment Ministers in December 1987. The new limit values, which are contained in a European Community Directive, will be implemented in full in the United Kingdom. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport expects to consult interested parties shortly on regulations bringing this into effect. A common position was taken by the Community on a farther stage of stricter limits for small car gaseous emissions in November 1988. This has been considered by the European Parliament, who have proposed amendments. It is now for the Commission to re-examine the common position taking into account the Parliament's proposals.

Football Grounds (Arrests)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest figure for the total number of arrests in the current season at the ground of each club in divisions one, two, three and four of the Football League; and what were the comparable figures at the same point in 1987-88.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

The most up-to-date figures collected centrally by the Association of Chief Police Officers are up to 31 October 1988. At the end of each football season the ACPO carefully reviews the returns from 43 individual forces relating to the number of arrests made at the 92 Football League clubs. Since the provisional totals have not yet been given a full end of season check, it would be inappropriate to publish a club-by-club breakdown. The available divisional totals are as follows:

Division	*1987-88 season to 31 October 1987*	*1988-89 season to 31 October 1988*
1	937	672
2	764	540
3	266	287
4	330	248

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Barlow Clowes

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to receive a report and recommendations from the Parliamentary Ombudsman on Barlow Clowes.

Mr. Maude: The handling of an investigation undertaken by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, and the timing of any report which he may make, are matters for the Commissioner.

Inner-city Regeneration

Mr. Mans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what support his Department is giving to encourage the Church and Church agencies to become more involved in inner-city regeneration.

Mr. Newton: We have contributed £148,000 to Evangelical Enterprise and £6,000 to Church Action with the Unemployed towards their work for the urban priority areas, and £215,000 to the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility for a linking-up project at Manchester designed to develop church-based projects in inner-city areas. Church-sponsored projects in 10 task force areas have already been helped by task force funding.

We have also established a churches liaison group, which will advise and assist those both of Christian denominations and of other faiths who wish to develop co-ordinated schemes for action in the inner cities.

Cricket Bats

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what investigations his Department has made of the impact of watermark disease on the export potential of the cricket bat manufacturing industry in the east midlands;

(2) what trends his Department anticipates in exports of British cricket bats.

Mr. Atkins: The issue of watermark disease has been raised with me on several occasions. I am advised that the virus is not currently a major threat to stocks of English willow, and I do not expect it adversely to affect the export of British cricket bats. As the hon. Member would expect, however, I am continuing to monitor developments closely.

Monopolies (References)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy on references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The Government's policy on references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is stated in a DTI Blue Paper entitled "Mergers Policy", published in March 1988. The main consideration in considering whether to refer a merger to the MMC is the potential effect on competition in the United Kingdom.

Newspapers (Proprietorial Interference)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions he has had with the Newspaper Publishers Association on proprietorial interference in the publishing of newspapers.

Mr. Maude: None.

Oil Prices

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about allegations of price fixing and collusion between the larger oil companies.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received concerning the oil pricing policies of the major oil companies, the ownership and operation of petrol stations and their pricing policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others about petrol prices. The wholesale supply of petrol is being investigated by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which is due to report by 8 November this year.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to publish its report on the motor fuel business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* The Commission is due to submit its report to my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State by 8 November. It will be published as soon as possible after it has been submitted to and considered by my right hon. and noble Friend.

Trade Statistics (1992)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if any changes are planned in the collection of trade statistics after 1992.

Mr. Maude: A proposal for an EC Council regulation, which sets out a revised methodology for the collection of trade statistics between member states of the European Community after 1992 to replace the current procedure based on customs' documentation, has been prepared by the EC Commission and will be considered by EC Ministers over the coming months.

Trade statistics will continue to be collected both for intra-EC trade and for trade with third countries, but the level of detail for commodity classification will be the subject of related legislation and will be discussed by a working party of officials from member states later this year. The Government are seeking to ensure that the collection of these statistics does not impose unnecessary burdens on business involved in trade between member states .

Shipbuilding

Mr. Mullins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many former employees of North East Shipbuilders Limited have found jobs under the British Shipbuilders job creation scheme; and how many of those jobs have lasted for more than one month.

Mr. Newton: As at 7 April 1989, 895 out of a total 1,637 former employees had found new jobs and a further 83 had been placed on retraining courses arranged by Sunderland Enterprise and Training Limited. There is no systematic information about how long jobs so far found have lasted, but only 40 clients of Sunderland Enterprise and Training Limited who had found work have so far returned for further assistance.

Textile Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what steps have been taken by his Department to ensure the continuation of the current system of national quotas for the multi-fibre arrangement after the introduction of the single European market in 1992;

(2) what estimate has been made by his Department of the impact which would result upon the United Kingdom textile and clothing industries from the possible introduction of a community quota system for the multi-fibre arrangement after the introduction of the single European market in 1992;

(3) what representations he has received and what discussions he is holding with the United Kingdom textile industry with regard to the consequences of the introduction of a community-wide quota system for the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not easy to estimate the impact of the possible phasing out of member states' shares of Community quotas under the multi-fibre arrangement, although I have received a number of representations expressing concern. The report which we have commissioned from Professor Silberston on the multi-fibre arrangement and the United Kingdom economy will address this issue.

The arrangements which will apply after 1992 are not at present determined. The European Commission has taken a general view that individual member states quotas or shares of European Community-wide quotas cannot continue after the introduction of the single European market. How far this will extend to the treatment of textiles and clothing has yet to be settled. The existing Community bilateral agreements with major multi-fibre

arrangement textile suppliers already allow for some automatic and increasing transfer between member states of each member state's share of the Community quotas. These arrangements work well. However, the present extension of the multi-fibre arrangement expires in 1991.

The future of the multi-fibre arrangement—and other textiles restrictions—is a matter for negotiation within the current Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations in GATT, which is due to conclude in September 1990. It is still too early to say what the outcome of these negotiations will be.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement outlining the progress which has been made so far in the current Uruguay round of general agreement on tariffs and trade multilateral trade negotiations with regard to the textile and clothing industries.

Mr. Alan Clark: The negotiating group on textiles and clothing has yet to enter detailed and substantive negotiations on the "modalities" for the return of the sector to GATT rules. At the mid-term review, which concluded with the meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee at the beginning of this month, it was reaffirmed that the process of reintegration of the textiles and clothing sector should be on the basis of strengthened GATT rules and disciplines and that the modalities should among other things cover the phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement and other restrictions inconsistent with GATT, together with the timing and progressive character of the process of integration. The TNC text preserves existing rights and obligations under the present MFA and calls upon all participants to try to improve the trade situation. Lengthy substantive negotiations can now be expected with a view to reaching an agreement within the time frame of the round.

Off-course Racing Information

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the Office of Fair Trading is now considering the monopoly position of the bookmaking interests in the transmission of racing information to the off-course market, in the light of the further allocation of equity in Satellite Information Services shortly to be allocated.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* I understand that the Director General of Fair Trading is continuing to monitor developments in the off-course bookmaking market under the competition legislation for which he is responsible.

Guinness plc.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how long the inspectors have now been investigating the affairs of Guinness plc; what has been the cost of the investigation to date; when he expects the inspectors to report; and whether the publication of the report will be deferred until all criminal proceedings arising from the Guinness affair have been disposed of.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* The inspectors have completed their inquiries, which have cost £1,657,410. Their report will not be published until the criminal proceedings are concluded.

James Ferguson Holdings plc

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how long the inspectors have now been investigating the affairs of James Ferguson Holdings plc; what has been the cost of the investigation to date; when he expects the inspectors to report; and whether the publication of the report will be deferred until all criminal proceedings arising from the Barlow Clowes affair have been disposed of.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Mr. Lawrence David Ziman, solicitor, and Mr. Walter Max Hoffman FCA were appointed on 10 June 1988 under section 432 of the Companies Act 1985 to investigate and report on the affairs of James Ferguson Holdings plc. On 4 July 1988, the same inspectors were appointed under section 442 of the Act to investigate and report on the membership of that company and under section 432 to investigate and report on the affairs of Barlow Clowes Gilt Managers Limited.

The investigations have cost £669,244 to date. I am unable to say when the inspectors will submit their report. The question of publication will be considered when the report is received.

COCOM

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the enforcement of COCOM rules to take account of the internal market in 1992.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Her Majesty's Government expect to see a considerable reduction in export controls well in advance of 1992, which should encourage the freer movement of goods within the European Community. We are examining the most effective means of streamlining our export controls procedures to achieve this, consistent with the need to continue to safeguard the national interest. This will not directly affect the work of the Co-ordinating Committee (COCOM) which is concerned with strategic export controls on trade with the eastern bloc and the People's Republic of China.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on *(a)* the progress on discussions to reduce the COCOM, and its period of rotating review and *(b)* the procedures for enforcement.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Her Majesty's Government recognise the vital need to shorten the COCOM control lists to ensure that controls are effective and the support of industry is retained. We are vigorously seeking ways, together with our COCOM partners, to streamline the lists both through the continuous list review procedure, which examines one quarter of the lists each year, and through one-off exercises. Some progress has been achieved, and in 1988, 17 items were partially or wholly removed from the lists and 57 items reduced to lower levels of control. It is difficult in practice to achieve a rapid reduction in the lists, given the requirement for unanimity within COCOM and the need for a strategic re-assessment of any items it is proposed to remove.

We are discussing with our COCOM partners ways of achieving more rapid progress.

Eastbourne Waterworks Company

Mr. Gow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the price increases imposed by the Eastbourne Waterworks Company following the takeover of the company by the French company SAUR S.A., in the light of the information provided to him by the hon. Member for Eastbourne in his letter dated 6 April.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* There are no plans to make a reference.

Nissan

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the export of vehicles manufactured by Nissan UK to the European Economic Community.

Mr. Alan Clark: *[pursuant to his reply, 18 January 1989]:* My right hon. and noble Friend wrote to Dr. Bangemann, the European Commissioner responsible for industry and the internal market, on 6 March asking him formally to clarify with the French Government that cars produced at Sunderland by Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK Ltd. are allowed to enter France quite independently of the level of car imports into France from Japan. Dr. Bangemann has just replied saying that the Commission has now received a formal assurance from the French Government that this will be the case.

On this basis, Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK Ltd. expects that its business with France will continue unimpeded. We welcome this resolution of the position and look forward to discussions with France and other member states on future policy in the European Community on the range of vehicles issues that will have to be considered in the context of completion of the single market.

Manufacturing Industry (Halifax)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many manufacturing jobs in Halifax have been lost during 1989.

Mr. John Lee: The information requested is not available. My Department's small area statistics monitor net only changes in employment between census of employment dates and the latest available figures are for September 1984. More up-to-date employee estimates for local areas, from the September 1987 census of employment, will become available later this year.

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety Week

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what response he has made to the Trades Union Congress national health and safety week; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Everyone concerned with work—employees and trades unions as well as employers—has a role to play in ensuring high standards of health and safety. Union-appointed safety representatives have an important contribution to make. I welcome the efforts of the TUC to encourage safety representatives to be more active in carrying out their statutory functions.

Palace of Westminster (Health and Safety)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will seek to bring the Palace of Westminister within the Factory and Health and Safety Acts.

Mr. Nicholls: No, I have no such proposals. The authorities of the Palace seek to ensure that the provisions of the Acts are met wherever possible. The Health and Safety Executive has arranged with the Palace authorities for visits to be made to give advice on health and safety matters. Visits may be made on the initiative of either the HSE or the Palace authorities.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the defintion of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Cope: The following table gives the information requested for the calendar year 1988:

	Number	*Cost* £
Employment Department	19	139,795
Employment Service	70	473,912
Training Agency	20	136,831
Health and Safety Executive	14	106,486
Total	123	857,024

Of these, 25 vehicles were definitely United Kingdom-produced, on the definition, employed by the DTI for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom-produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value. A further 95 vehicles comprised models of multinational companies which are manufactured both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. It would be possible to determine how many were United Kingdom-produced only by individual inspection of each vehicle.

The selection and purchase of vehicles in the Department is normally restricted to European Community made or assembled vehicles.

Job Clubs

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of the number of job clubs, since the start of the intitiative to the most recent date, by year, for the north-west region and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Lee: The number of job clubs for north-west region and the rest of Great Britain from the start of the programme in November 1984 to the latest available date is shown in the table.

Date	*North West*	*Great Britain*
November 1984	—	2
April 1985	—	4
April 1986	4	29

Date	North West	Great Britain
April 1987	157	991
April 1988	200	1,204
February 1989	207	1,220

Mr. Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) on what premise closure of 220 employment service job clubs is based;

(2) when he made the decision to close 220 employment service job clubs.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) on 27 January 1989, *Official Report*, column *810*.

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of the advertising and publicity expenditure for the Training Agency for each financial year from 1979 to the present date.

Mr. Cope: The information is given in the table:

Spending on advertising and publicity by the Manpower Services Commission

Year	Amount £ million
1979-80	n.a.
1980-81	5·5
1981-82	4·7
1982-83	6·3
1983-84	4·9
1984-85	6·1
1985-86	17·0
1986-87	34·9
1987-88	35·9

Information on budgets for 1988-89 and 1989-90 for spending on general publicity, to include the Training Agency, will be found in table 7.29 on page 25 of the Public Expenditure White Paper, cm. 607, published January 1989. Details of final expenditure for 1988-89 are not yet available. Detailed decisions on expenditure by media group for 1989-90 as requested have not yet been taken.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of the advertising and publicity expenditure for his Department for each financial year from 1979 to the present date.

Mr. Cope: The amount spent by the Department of Employment on advertising and publicity in each financial year is as follows:

Year	Amount £ million
1979-80	0·7
1980-81	0·3
1981-82	0·4
1982-83	0·5
1983-84	0·5
1984-85	0·3
1985-86	1·2
1986-87	16·4
1987-88	10·5
1988-89	[1]18.3

[1]This includes expenditure for the Employment Service. Training Agency expenditure is not included.

Skill Centres

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the report of Deloitte Haskins into the efficiency of skill centres.

Mr. Cope: Deloittee, Haskins and Sells reported on the feasibility of moving the Skills Training Agency into the private sector. The report will not be published.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of which skill centres are under-used.

Mr. Cope: Details of the utilisation of individual skill centres are commercially confidential in the context of the private tender sale process.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of what the core business of each skill centre will be following privatisation.

Mr. Cope: We hope that skill centres will become viable businesses that provide good training for both unemployed and employed people.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legally binding guarantees he will obtain in order to secure for the public sector benefit of any windfall gains on sale of assets following skill centre privatisation.

Mr. Cope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 13 March that he would make provision for the Government to share in any development gains in the years immediately after sale. We shall be receiving professional advise as to the form such provision should take.

Earnings

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of the average weekly earnings of full-time 16-year-old 17-year-old and 18-year-old employees, for each year since 1979 to the present.

Mr. Lee: The information is provided in the table.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees whose earnings were not affected by absence—Great Britain

April	Aged 16 £	Aged 17 £	Aged 18 £
1979	34·7	40·8	49·8
1980	41·9	49·6	60·7
1981	47·5	55·4	66·9
1982	50·1	59·5	71·8
1983	52·6	61·4	76·4
1984	55·0	63·7	78·8
1985	60·2	70·0	83·3
1986	66·8	74·5	91·5
1987	73·4	81·1	96·0
1988	79·7	92·5	107·2

Source: New Earnings Survey.

YTS

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the levels of the 1985 YTS allowance

for first and second-year trainees would have been had it risen annually in line with *(a)* the retail prices index, *(b)* average earnings and *(c)* the average yearly rate of inflation.

Mr. Cope: The two-year YTS was introduced in April 1986, at which date the YTS allowances were set at £27·30 per week for first year trainees and £35 per week for second year trainees. If the allowances had been increased in line with changes in the retail price index they would have been £31·25 and £40·07 respectively in February 1989. If adjusted in line with increases in the average earnings index, the allowances would have been £33·57 and £43·04 respectively in January 1989. Adjusting the allowance for the rate of inflation is equivalent to the adjustment made for changes in the retail price index. Many trainees receive more than the minimum level of the trainee allowance.

HEALTH

Eye and Dental Examinations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring of charges for eye and dental examinations his Department is undertaking; and what are the initial results of such monitoring.

Mr. Mellor: There is no charge for NHS sight tests. We shall be monitoring the position in respect of private tests in the autumn. Concerning the dental examination, I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 6 March to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) at column *421*.

Inspectors of Anatomy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of Her Majesty's inspectors of anatomy are in post; how many vacant posts there are; what is the position in Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement on the qualifications for this post.

Mr. Mellor: Her Majesty's inspector of anatomy is appointed for the inspection and licencing of premises for anatomical examination in England, Scotland and Wales.

The appointment is made on the basis of the recommendation of the chief medical officers for the aforementioned countries.

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funds have been specifically earmarked for the care of the mentally ill following the closure of mental hospitals in *(a)* the current and *(b)* each of the last two years in each health region;

(2) on what information about mental health his Department has allocated funds to regional health authorities in the current year.

Mr. Freeman: For the most part, allocations to regional health authorities do not make separate provision for individual clinical services or client groups. It is for authorities to determine how the resources available to them should be spent in line with national policy guidelines and their assessment of local needs and priorities.

A total of £6 million has, however, been made available over the last three years specifically for mental illness development projects in the community. The aim of this initiative has been to establish or improve multidisciplinary community-based services for people with mental illness, especially adults suffering from serious disorders. Regional shares of these funds are shown in the table.

Additionally, joint finance is available to support the development of community services planned jointly by health and local authorities and the voluntary sector and to promote the shift from hospital to community care. The total joint finance allocation to regions in each of the last three years has been:

Year	*£ million cash*
1987-88	110·9
1988-89	112·9
1989-90	118·5

Some two thirds of these allocations have been or will be spent on services for mentally handicapped, mentally ill and younger physically disabled people.

Mental Illness Development Projects: Allocations

RHA	*1986-87 (£000s cash)*	*1987-88 (£000s cash)*	*1988-89 (£000s cash)*	*1989-90 (£000s cash)*
Northern	—	139	144	151
Yorkshire	—	106	161	169
Trent	10	114	137	144
East Anglian	15	149	149	[1]—
North East Thames	—	128	143	164
North West Thames	35	139	145	112
South East Thames	—	113	115	120
South West Thames	—	145	161	126
Wessex	—	166	202	53
Oxford	18	149	154	112
South Western	—	73	161	202
West Midlands	25	142	196	175
Mersey	33	99	142	152
North Western	—	141	137	144
Bethlem and Maudsley SHA	—	141	74	78
Totals	[2]136	1,944	[3]2,221	1,902

Notes:

[1] East Anglian's 1989-90 allocation is still the subject of discussion between the Region and the Department.

[2] Includes £40k issued as capital.

[3] includes £284k issued as capital.

Mental Handicap and Illness

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his best estimate of the numbers of people with *(a)* mental handicaps and *(b)* mental illness who are aged 65 years and over; and what advice on services and other provisions for these groups his Department gives to health and local authorities.

Mr. Freeman: We have no basis upon which to estimate the prevalence of mental illness or mental handicap, neither of which is a well defined term, among the estimated 7·4 million people aged 65 years or more. I can say that at 31 December 1986, the latest date for which figures are available centrally, the number of people aged 65 years or more in NHS hospitals and units in England was as follows:

	Number
(a) Mental Handicap hospitals, units and community units	5,552
(b) Mental illness hospitals and units	34,341

In recent years we have issued the following relevant guidance, copies of which are in the Library.
DHSS Study Team Report "Helping Mentally Handicapped People with Special Problems".
Health Advisory Service Report "The Rising Tide".
Government Response to the Second Report from the Social Services Committee Cmnd. No. 9674.

Hospices

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to complete his review into the funding of hospices.

Mr. Mellor: I expect to complete the review shortly.

Trainee Nurses

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trainees have entered nursing for a state registered nurse or registered general nurse course in England and Wales for each of the last three years.

Mr. Mellor: The information is as follows:

Numbers entering registered general nurse training England: years ending 31 March

	Number
1986	14,220
1987	14,014
1988	13,581

Source: English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

The information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Project 2000

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement on the pilot areas chosen for Project 2000.

Mr. Mellor: Discussions are currently taking place with the 13 selected demonstration districts on the manpower and financial aspects of their proposals. Following these discussions financial allocations will be made.

Health Authorities (Surplus Land and Buildings)

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the proceeds of surplus land and buildings disposed of by health authorities since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply by my hon. and learned Friend to the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on 19 December 1988 at columns *131-34*. Figures for 1988-89 are not yet available.

Hospitals (Cleaning Contracts)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of the occasions since the award of private cleaning contracts at the Kent and Canterbury hospital, the Thanet district hospital and the royal seabathing hospital upon which payments for specific cleaning areas have been suspended.

Mr. Freeman: We do not hold this information centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the chairman of Canterbury and Thanet health authority to obtain the information requested.

Cot Deaths

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the major causes of sudden infant death syndrome.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the report of what I said during the Adjournment debate of 20 March at columns *885-90*.

Mr. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the research projects into cot deaths funded by his Department and their cost since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: A full list of research directly funded by the Department of Health since 1979 which may be relevant to cot deaths is not readily available. The Department did however fund a major study specifically into cot deaths, co-ordinated by Professor Knowelden of the medical care research unit at Sheffield university, for the period 1976 to 1985. The total cost, including sponsorship of a seminar to facilitate dissemination of the findings, was around £285,000.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom. The MRC receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science. For current MRC research relevant to cot deaths I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on 20 February at columns *524-25*.

Mr. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have died in each year since 1979 from sudden infant death syndrome.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table, which gives the number of deaths registered at age under one year with any mention of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), cot death or similar term irrespective of whether or not it was assigned as underlying cause of death.

Number of deaths registered under one year of age with any mention of sudden infant death on the death certificate, England and Wales 1979-80[1]

Year	*Number*		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*
1979	637	442	1,079
1980	740	482	1,222
1981	755	510	1,265
1982	822	510	1,332
1983	827	488	1,315
1984	716	526	1,242
1985	787	514	1,301
1986	945	559	1,504
1987	918	610	1,528
[1]1988	905	538	1,443

[1] Provisional, January—November.

Listeria

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *162*, in what foods the thermo-tolerance of listeria has been studied.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The foods used as a base for the research referred to in my reply to the hon. Member on 14

March at column *162* were cooked beef, chicken and carrots, chosen to provide an across the board sample of texture and density of food commonly used in cook-chill catering systems.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *162*, what conclusions were reached during tests as to the length of time specific temperatures must be maintained during the heating and reheating of cook-chill food in order to destroy listeria monocytogenes.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The authors of the research concluded that a temperature of 70°C for two minutes at the slowest heating point of the food was required for the effective decontamination of listeria monocytogenes.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Freeman: Only 5 per cent. of the vehicles purchased in 1988 for the then Department of Health and Social Security were for the use of Department of Health staff and some 60 per cent. of all DHSS vehicles purchased in that year were United Kingdom produced on the definition employed by the DTI for statistical purposes under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works price.

Information in the form requested in respect of the purchase of NHS vehicles is not available centrally. This is a matter for each regional and district health authority. The total value of vehicles purchased in the NHS in 1987-88, the latest year for which figures are available, was £22·371 million.

Social Workers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has as to the number of social workers employed by local authorities, on *(a)* unpaid leave of absence and *(b)* paid leave of absence, to undertake activities as councillors in neighbouring local authorities.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Homelessness

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest figure for the number of children in care because of family homelessness.

Mr. Mellor: A child may be taken into care for a number of reasons of which homelessness may be a contributory factor, although not identified as a specific cause in the statistics.

Provisional figures show that there were 420 children in care in England at 31 March 1987 where the specific cause was that their family was homeless.

District Health Authorities (General Managers)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will detail the pay gradings of each district health authority general manager in the Yorkshire region.

Mr. Mellor: The gradings of district general manager posts in the Yorkshire region, and the salary grade rates from 1 September 1988, are set out in the table. In addition, district general managers are eligible for a discretionary addition of up to 10 per cent. of the grade rate (to reflect differences in job weight) and performance related pay. Details of the performance-related pay awarded to individual general managers are confidential between them and their employer.

Grade	*Grade rate at 1 September 1988 (£)*	*Districts*
1	37,110	Leeds Western Leeds Eastern Bradford
2	35,450	Hull York East Yorkshire Huddersfield Wakefield Calderdale
3	33,790	Scunthorpe Dewsbury Grimsby Harrogate Airedale Pontefract Northallerton

Medical Secretaries

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will consider recognising the diploma of medical secretaries as a basis for proficiency awards;

(2) if he has any plans to introduce a separate salary scale for medical secretaries;

(3) what are the current pay scales for each area health authority for medical secretaries.

Mr. Mellor: Pay and conditions of service for medical secretaries in the NHS are matters for negotiation in the administrative and clerical staffs Whitley council. Medical secretaries are employed in various grades with basic annual pay scales for adults ranging from £5,059 to £9,440. London weighting of up to £1,267 is payable in addition. The grading of posts, according to their particular responsibilities, is a matter for individual employing authorities. Additional allowances of up to £667 may be payable for tested proficiency in typing, shorthand and audio skills. The qualifications recognised for automatic entitlement to proficiency allowances which do not include the diploma of the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Administrators and Receptionists are also determined by the Whitley council. Negotiations are continuing in the council on proposals for changes in the pay and grading structures of all administrative and clerical staff.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each health authority paid in the latest year for which figures are available in agencies fees for personnel to cover medical secretary duties.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this information centrally.

NHS Reform

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will summarise, and place in the Library, the reactions he has received from general practitioner, consultant and nurses organisations to the proposed reform of the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have already received a wide range of comments from many people but I expect many more. I will take them fully into account as the process of implementation goes forward. All the organisations have taken steps to publicise their reactions and I see little useful purpose in my summarising their views on which I am sure the Library is well placed to brief the right hon. Member.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to treat general practitioners who volunteer for budgets as running a demonstration project and ensure that the proposed reforms are only a framework, not immutable.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are currently considering the detailed operation of the practice budget scheme so that the first practices can have their budgets from April 1991 onwards. We will of course then keep the system under review and make any improvements which are necessary in the light of experience.

Hospitals (Opting Out)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reactions he has received from the first six hospitals which were expected to opt out of health authority control.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have never had expectations about which hospitals, from the many potential candidates, will be among the first applicants for self-governing status. Some recent reports to the contrary were based on the mistaken belief that the first six hospitals involved in the development of the resource management initiative were automatically expected to choose self-government. The chief executive of the National Health Service management board has asked regional health authorities to forward expressions of interest in self-government to the Department by 31 May.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on payments made to each member of the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 28 November 1988 at columns *149-50*.

Mowbray Grange Hospital, Bedale

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce a decision about the future of Mowbray Grange hospital, Bedale.

Mr. Freeman: Proposals such as this need careful consideration. I do however expect to be able to announce a decision shortly.

Doctors (Investigations)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many requests he received from family practitioner committees to approve out-of-time investigations into allegations involving one or more doctors in 1988.

Mr. Mellor: Forty four.

Young People (Care)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to local authority social services departments concerning support for 17-year-old young people leaving care.

Mr. Mellor: The powers and duties of local authorities for children leaving care are set out in sections 27 to 29 of the Child Care Act 1980.

For the past six years the Department has given a grant to the voluntary organisation First Key to enable it to promote effective planning by local authorities for young people leaving care and to develop good practice, through consultancy work with individual local authorities and through conferences and publications.

Proposals to extend and enhance the powers and duties of local authorities for children leaving care are contained in clause 20 of the Children Bill now before the House. If agreed, it is intended that a detailed circular of guidance will be issued to local authorities on implementation of the provisions.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Rating Reform

1. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he anticipates the take-up of rebates on the community charge will be.

7. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he anticipates the take-up of rebates on the community charge will be.

17. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he anticipates will be the take-up of rebates on the community charge.

35. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he anticipates will be the take-up of rebates on the community charge.

37. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he anticipates will be the take-up of rebates on the community charge.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We expect just over 11 million people to receive community charge benefits when the scheme is fully in place throughout Great Britain.

Housing Benefit

9. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had recently with local authorities on housing benefit.

19. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had recently with local authorities on housing benefit.

26. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had recently with local authorities on housing benefits.

29. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had recently with local authorities on housing benefit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Department has regular meetings with the local authority associations throughout the year to discuss housing benefit and we consult them formally on proposals for regulations.

Family Credit

11. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate for the number of households eligible for family credit in Wales; and what number of households are receiving family credit in Wales.

Mr. Moore: We do not have separate figures of eligibility for Wales. About 20,000 families in Wales were actually receiving family credit at the end of January. This compares with 14,000 families who received family income support supplement under the old scheme.

16. **Mr. Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he anticipates that the number of awards of family credit will reach 470,000.

24. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he anticipates that the number of awards of family credit will reach 470,000.

47. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, when he anticipates that the number of awards of family credit will reach 470,000.

Mr. Moore: Since family credit began last April, more than 650,000 awards have been made.

22. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of family credit recipients are receiving £30 or more.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of February, more than 35 per cent. of family credit recipients were receiving £30 or more per week. Awards are made for 26 weeks, so these families are guaranteed at least £780, tax free, over the six months. This confirms that the families who are most in need of family credit are already claiming. But we recognise that there are still many families who are not aware that they may be eligible. That is why we have just begun our major advertising campaign.

39. **Mr. Maples:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of family credit recipients are receiving £20 per week or more.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of February, about 60 per cent. of family credit recipients were receiving £20 or more per week.

52. **Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average award made to recipients of family credit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest information on family credit is derived from an examination of amounts in payment at the end of February 1989; this indicated that the average amount in payment at that time was around £25 a week.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the simplified family credit form (FC1) to be issued; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The new version of claim form FC1 is already available in local social security offices. Stocks are being distributed by the Post Office and should be available in their offices within the next few days. Claims for family credit will continue to be accepted on the old style forms.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated take-up of family credit during 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The percentage take-up of family credit in 1989-90 will not be known until information from the 1989 family expenditure survey is available.

Pensioners (Earnings Rule)

17. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is being done to encourage older people to carry on working.

Mr. Scott: From 1 October the pensioners' earnings rule is to be abolished so that pensioners will receive automatically their full state retirement pension, to which they are entitled, regardless of their earnings. This will increase choice and flexibility for people over pension age who wish to work.

25. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the pensioners' earnings rule will be abolished.

Mr. Scott: From 1 October 1989.

34. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is being done to give more choice and flexibility for older people who want to carry on working.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Older people who wish to carry on working will have more choice and flexibility from 1 October 1989 when the earnings rule for pensioners is to be abolished. Pensioners will be able to go on working without having their state pension reduced and will no longer be barred from receiving a full pension if they work more than 12 hours a week. It will still be possible for people to defer drawing their pension for up to five years after pension age, thus increasing their entitlement by about 7·5 per cent. for each year of deferment.

45. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners are currently estimated to be earning in excess of £75 per week and are subject to pension reduction or abatement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Approximately 2,500 individuals currently have their pensions reduced as a result of the pensioners' earnings rule, which is to be abolished from 1 October 1989.

Child Benefit

18. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he next plans to review the level of child benefit.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend is required to review the level of child benefit each year, and he does this as part of his annual review of benefit rates. He will announce his decision to the House in the usual way in the autumn.

23. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage of take-up of child benefit.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated to be 98 per cent.

Income Support

20. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will arrange for the full uprating of income support for claimants in receipt of transitional additions.

36. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will arrange for the full uprating of income support for claimants in receipt of transitional additions.

42. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will arrange for the full uprating of income support for claimants in receipt of transitional additions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The income support payable to all but a small number of claimants was uprated last week. We have no plans to change the rules for uprating.

Attendance Allowance

21. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to increase the level of payment and take-up of constant attendant allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 6 March at column *449* and my reply to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 10 January at column *574*.

Widows' Benefit

28. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he is doing in response to the ruling made by the Social Security Commissioner on 28 February in respect of widows' benefit.

Mr. Scott: The women affected by the commissioner's decision have been identified and are being paid. Any widow who thinks she may be affected and has not been contacted should approach her local social security office.

Retirement Pensions

30. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the weekly state retirement pension for a single person following the recent uprating; and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: From 10 April the full weekly rate of state retirement pension is £43·60 for a single pensioner, and £69·80 for a pensioner couple. In November 1979 the full weekly rate was £23·30 for a single pensioner, and £37·30 for a pensioner couple.

National Insurance

31. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the proposed changes in employees' national insurance contributions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have received only one representation.

40. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the effects of the recently announced changes in national insurance contributions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The reform of national insurance contributions announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget Statement on 14 March builds on the system of reduced rate contributions for lower paid employees which was introduced in 1985. As at present, people earning less than £43 a week will not pay contributions. From October 1989, however, employees earning £43 a week or more will pay a contribution made up of 2 per cent. of the first £43 of earnings and the standard 9 per cent. (7 per cent. for employees contracted out of SERPS) on the balance of earnings up to the upper earnings limit, currently £325 a week.

These changes are a major reform of the way in which employees' contributions are determined. They will remove two of the three steps in the national insurance system which can result in pay increases being more than offset by higher contributions, leaving the employee worse off. And the first step, when people start paying contributions, will be more than halved.

50. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will be affected by the reform in the way in which employees' contributions are determined.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government Actuary's Department estimates that during the second half of the 1989-90 financial year a weekly average of about 19 million people in Great Britain will be affected by the change in the structure of employees' national insurance contributions. Of these, about 15 million will gain £3 a week.

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the changes to be made in employees' national insurance contributions will take effect.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: From the tax week which begins on Thursday 5 October 1989.

Women's Refuges

32. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received recently on proposed changes to funding for women's refuges.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A number of hon. Members, organisations and members of the public have made representations echoing those made by organisations representing women's refuges mentioned in my reply to the hon. Member on 23 January at columns *417-18*.

Benefits

33. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average annual expenditure in benefit payment, per capita, in the last financial year for *(a)* registered disabled people of working age who were unemployed and *(b)* people with no known disability of working age who were unemployed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many supplementary benefit payments under the urgent cases regulations were awarded in the period

(a) April 1985 to March 1986 inclusive, *(b)* April 1986 to March 1987 inclusive, and *(c)* April 1987 to March 1988 inclusive in respect of each Department of Social Security local office of Redcar, Eston, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Hartlepool; and what were the amounts awarded from each office.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of successful claims made under the urgent cases provisions is in the table. I regret that information on the total amount awarded for each office is not available.

	Statistical years (April to April)		
	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Redcar	465	544	722
Eston	658	535	484
Middlesbrough	1,677	1,486	1,199
Stockton	948	915	1,113
Hartlepool	1,210	897	622

Source: Internal Management Information Statistics.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many single payments were awarded in the period *(a)* April 1985 to March 1986 inclusive, *(b)* April 1986 to March 1987 inclusive, and *(c)* April 1987 to March 1988 inclusive in respect of each Department of Social Security local office of Redcar, Eston, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Hartlepool; and what were the amounts awarded from each office.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on the numbers and total values of supplementary benefit single payments made by all offices of the Department for the periods in question is in the Library.

War Widows

38. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's future proposals for war widows.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The standard basic rate of tax-free war widow's pension, which is 30 per cent. higher than the taxable national insurance widow's pension, was increased from £53·50 to £56·65 a week from 10 April 1989. On top of that, age allowances are paid of £6·10 at age 65, £12·20 at 70 and £15·30 at 80, and 85 per cent. of war widows receive an age allowance. War widows may also receive a retirement pension if they worked and paid contributions, and it is estimated that about 75 per cent. do. War widows with children receive an addition of £12·60 a week for each child and may also receive a rent allowance of up to £21·55 a week and an education allowance of up to £120 a year. It is proposed to maintain these very preferential provisions for war widows.

Community Care

41. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what aspects of entitlement to community care grants he has under review.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None at present, but we are continuing to monitor closely the operation of the social fund and have recently commissioned independent research into the extent to which it is meeting its objectives. We have taken a number of steps to improve local awareness and understanding of community care grants and are currently considering what additional measures might be taken to improve national information on the scheme. We shall also shortly be issuing revised guidance to social fund officers in the social fund manual.

Unemployment Benefits

43. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of social security benefit expenditure in 1988-89 was devoted to unemployed people; and what were the comparable figures for the previous two years.

Mr. Scott: The latest estimate is that benefits for unemployed people were about 12 per cent. of total social security benefit expenditure in 1988-89, compared with over 16 per cent. in 1986-87 and about 14 per cent. in 1987-88.

Carers

44. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his future plans for the welfare of people looking after relations.

Mr. Scott: We shall look at invalid care allowance in the light of the results of the OPCS surveys of disability, together with benefits for disabled people themselves.

Pensioners (Incomes)

46. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners were in the lowest fifth of the national income distribution in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In 1979, 38 per cent. of pensioners tax units[1] were in the lowest fifth of the national income distribution. By 1986 this figure had fallen to 24 per cent.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

[1] A pensioner tax unit is a single person of pensionable age or a couple where the man is of pensionable age.

Child Maintenance

48. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has as to the percentage of divorced and separated men who do not contribute towards the maintenance of their children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This Department does not hold information in the form requested. The information we have relates only to maintenance paid for lone parent families receiving income support (formerly supplementary benefit), of whom 95 per cent. are lone mothers. The most recent figures available are for May 1987 and show that fathers were not paying maintenance for children in about 60 per cent. of the cases involving divorced mothers and about 70 per cent. of cases involving separated mothers. The Government are naturally concerned by these figures.

Source: Supplementary Benefit Annual Statistical Enquiry 1987.

Attendance Allowance

49. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the availability of attendance allowance to the carers of children under the age of two years who suffer severe disability.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 22 February at column *682*.

Young People

51. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he is doing to help young people who are experiencing particular difficulty in living independently.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to my hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) on 13 March, at columns *27-8*.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to ensure that no young person in Stoke on Trent North will be evicted as a direct result of the benefit changes on 10 April.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The principal aim of the reform of income support for people living in board and lodging accommodation is to put this group on a par with the majority of households who look to the housing benefit scheme for help with accommodation costs and income support for help with other necessities. The new arrangements therefore take a substantial step towards making the social security system neutral as to accommodation type, thereby removing perverse incentives for both claimants and landlords towards particular kinds of housing. Help with any reasonable lodging charge is available through housing benefit. For the majority of boarders, transitional arrangements are in place to make good any shortfall between the new and old levels of benefit for up to three months. The Government believe that these arrangements give sufficient time for both claimants and landlords to adapt to the new benefit rules.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish tables, similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing the calculation of net weekly spending power of each of the following (i) a 16-year-old person on first year YTS, (ii) a 17-year-old person on second year YTS and (iii) a 17-year-old person leaving care and not on a YTS scheme, both under the existing system for paying board and lodging and under the proposed system from April, and in all tables working on the following assumptions: that the persons have no parents and must live independently in the Redcar Department of Social Security ILO area *(a)* in full board accommodation, occupying one room costing £55 per week, *(b)* in bed, breakfast and evening meal accommodation, occupying one room costing £44 per week and *(c)* in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, occupying one room costing £33 per week that in all cases the young person incurs a travelling cost to and from YTS, of £2·50 per week and that the rent and rates element of the charge consists of £23 rent, £4 general rates, £1 water rates and charges of £1 for laundry and £1 for cleaning; and in each case, if he will indicate the items and services which remain to be met by the individual out of their net weekly income.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The information requested is as follows:

Full board: charge £55 a week

Claimant type[1]	*Basic income support*	*Income support transitional protection*[2]	*Other income*	*Income support entitlement*	*Housing benefit entitlement*[3]	*Total income*	*Disposable income*[4]
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
March 1989							
16-year-old on YTS	65·30	—	29·50	35·80	—	65·30	7·80
17-year-old on YTS	65·30	—	35·00	30·30	—	65·30	7·80
17-year-old not on YTS[5]	65·30	—	—	65·30	—	65·30	10·30
April 1989							
16-year-old on YTS	20·80	18·30	29·50	9·60	26·20	65·30	7·80
17-year-old on YTS	20·80	18·30	35·00	4·10	26·20	65·30	7·80
17-year-old not on YTS	20·80	18·30	—	39·10	26·20	65·30	10·30

Bed, Breakfast and Evening Meal: charge £44 a week

Claimant type[1]	*Basic income support*	*Income support transitional protection*[2]	*Other income*	*Income support entitlement*	*Housing benefit entitlement*[3]	*Total income*	*Disposable income*[4]
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
March 1989							
16-year-old on YTS	65·15	—	29·50	35·65	—	65·15	18·65
17-year-old on YTS	65·15	—	35·00	30·15	—	65·15	18·65
17-year-old not on YTS[5]	65·15	—	—	65·15	—	65·15	21·15
April 1989							
16-year-old on YTS	20·80	18·15	29·50	9·45	26·20	65·15	18·65
17-year-old on YTS	20·80	18·15	35·00	3·95	26·20	65·15	18·65
17-year-old not on YTS	20·80	18·15	—	38·95	26·20	65·15	21·15

Bed and Breakfast: charge £33 a week

Claimant type[1]	*Basic income support* £	*Income support transitional protection*[2] £	*Other income* £	*Income support entitlement* £	*Housing benefit entitlement*[3] £	*Total income* £	*Disposable income*[4] £
March 1989							
16-year-old on YTS	65·00	—	29·50	35·50	—	65·00	29·50
17-year-old on YTS	65·00	—	35·00	30·00	—	65·00	29·50
17-year-old not on YTS[5]	65·00	—	—	65·00	—	65·00	32·00
April 1989							
16-year-old on YTS	20·80	18·00	29·50	9·30	26·20	65·00	29·50
17-year-old on YTS	20·80	18·00	35·00	3·80	26·20	65·00	29·50
17-year-old not on YTS	20·80	18·00	—	38·80	26·20	65·00	32·00

Footnotes:

[1] The tables show figures calculated on the [redacted] that the same individual is claiming benefit in both March and April 1989.

[2] To protect people who would receive less benefit overall as a result of the change in benefit rules, transitional protection is provided as follows:

Long-term protection: for people in supported lodgings who receive care and support from the landlord.
Up to 52 weeks: for families in hotels who are *not* sponsored by a local authority.
Up to 13 weeks: for any other person on YTS or ET, or aged 25 or over, or a vulnerable person aged under 25.
No protection: for fit, unemployed people aged under 25 who were previously subject to time limits.

[3] Actual housing benefit entitlement would be calculated by the local authority by deducting from the overall changes given, of £55, £44 or £33, the appropriate amounts in respect of meals, fuel and other ineligible items to arrive at the eligible rent, which they may then restrict if they consider it to be unreasonably high. The actual eligible rent could accordingly be higher than the £23 suggested resulting in a higher level of housing benefit payable.

For the purposes of these tables, housing benefit entitlement has however been calculated on the basis of the suggested rent of £23 (which it is assumed does not include the charges for water, laundry, cleaning, or any other ineligible items), and eligible rates of £3·20 (£4 less 20 per cent.).

[4] Disposable income has been calculated by deducting the following expenses from the gross income of income support, housing benefit and YTS allowance (as appropriate):

— Overall charge of £55, £44 or £33 respectively;
— Travel expenses of £2·50 (for YTS participants).

[5] It has been assumed that the individual

a. is eligible for income support under regulation 13A of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987; and
b. was exempt from board and lodging time limits by virtue of paragraph 16(4) of schedule 5 of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987, which was in force immediately prior to 10 April 1989.

Conductive Education

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date the Minister of State for Social Security visited the Peto Institute for conductive education in Hungary.

Mr. Scott: I visited the Peto Institute for conductive education in Budapest on 19 September 1988 and on 20 September 1988 I visited the institute's outstation at Kiskunhalas.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled has associated the Government with the appeal for the launch of an international foundation for conductive education; and what funds have been allocated so far.

Mr. Scott: I sent a message to the Hungarian Government on the occasion of the launch of the appeal for the international foundation for conductive education on 14 March expressing support for the appeal and the hope that the United Kingdom would be able to be involved in the development of the international foundation. Discussions are still in progress about possible funding, and no sum has yet been offered.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the occasions on which the Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled has had meetings with Ministers in other countries to discuss the appeal for the launch of an international foundation for conductive education; and what was the outcome of those discussions.

Mr. Scott: During a visit to Hungary from 18 to 21 September 1988, I learned of plans for an international foundation for conductive education, in the course of discussions with Hungarian Ministers. Conductive education was also discussed at the visit to the United Kingdom of the Hungarian Minister of Health in October 1988. A formal invitation to participate in developing an international foundation for conductive education was not, however, received until December 1988. I have not discussed this matter with overseas Ministers in person since then, but I met an official delegation from the Hungarian Government on 17 January to discuss the plan in greater detail, and I sent a message to the Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister at the launch of the international appeal for funds for the new institute.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many vehicles, and of what value, were purchased by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 182 vehicles were purchased in 1988 at a cost of £1·3 million, for use on matters connected with social security.

Of these vehicles 173 were United Kingdom-produced, on the definition employed by the Department of Trade and Industry for statistical purposes under which a vehicle

is classified as United Kingdom-produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value.

Elderly People (Residential Care)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what arrangements he is making to accommodate those former elderly residents of private residential homes displaced as a result of the failure to uprate the maximum level of support to cover the cost of keeping such elderly people in private homes;

(2) what is the estimate of the number of elderly people with little or no savings who will be unable to continue to live in private residential homes as a result of the failure to uprate the maximum level of support to cover the cost of keeping such elderly people in private homes.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no evidence to show that people are being displaced from homes. The Department continues to provide significant cash help to people who choose to go into residential care, to help them meet their fees. We aim to assist people to pay reasonable charges.

From this month we are providing extra help to nearly nine out of ten people who claim income support in residential care and nursing homes.

Benefit Deductions

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the contents of his recent circular to his Department's offices on the amount to be left to the claimant after deducting unpaid poll tax; and on what authority this instruction was given.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) on 14 April at column *743*.

Boundary Changes

Mr. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reconsider the effects of recent boundary changes on the social fund allocations for Havant and Portsmouth South local offices.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The effects of an earlier boundary change have been reassessed and as a consequence the budgets for both Havant and Portsmouth South local offices have been revised from 1 April 1989. The revised figures are:

	Loans	*Grants*	*Per head of caseload*
	£	£	£
Havant	188,253	77,732	40·40
Portsmouth South	184,749	79,454	30·60

Transitional Payments

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long, on average, claimants wait after submitting a claim for a transitional payment to the transitional payment unit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 13 April at column *685*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Healthy Food

63. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will review his policy on the case of low cholesterol and healthy food to be served in all canteens at the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Wakeham: I have no plans to do so at present. The Refreshment Department is aware of the need to promote the use of low cholesterol and healthy foods as far as is compatible with meeting the overal demands of Members and staff.

Ten-Minute Bills

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to end the current procedure of queuing for ten-minute Bills, and to institute a sytem of ballots which limits hon. Members to one Bill per Parliament.

Mr. Wakeham: Discussions have been taking place through the usual channels about possible changes in the arrangements for giving notice of ten-minute Bills. I have also asked the Select Committee on Procedure for its opinion, but I am not yet in a position to bring forward any proposals.

Refreshment Department Staff (Facilities)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if the Commission has any plans to improve rest room and changing facilities for Refreshment Department staff.

Mr. Beith: Action has already been taken by the Services Committee to improve rest and changing facilities for Refreshment Department staff and a contingency plan exists for making additional accommodation available should a further need be identified by the General Manager of the Refreshment Department, whose responsibility it is in the first instance to determine the precise nature of his Department's requirements.

SCOTLAND

Food Poisoning (Prisons)

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received any recent representations from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about food poisoning in prisons and remand centres; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities wrote to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland on 9 March. In its letter, COSLA referred to two outbreaks of food poisoning at Longriggend remand centre and urged that steps be taken to remove Crown immunity. A number of right hon. and hon. Members have since written to colleagues and myself on the matter.

The subject of Crown immunity in the area of food hygiene is one which is being considered in the current review of food legislation. Meanwhile, the Government take very seriously any matter of health and hygiene within penal establishments in general and kitchen areas in particular.

In the two cases referred to by COSLA, the environmental health officers from Monklands district council were immediately invited to help trace the source of the infection. In the light of the advice given by them, improvements in the kitchen have been carried out.

Scottish Community Education Council

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to further develop the Scottish Community Education Council.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In January 1989, we approved the council's corporate plan setting out its major priorities for the next three years as adult basic education; work with young people; adult and continuing education; and training for community education providers. It is open to the Council to propose changes to its priorities. Further development will depend to a large extent on the council's ability to generate income from its activities.

Constituency Boundaries

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for the redistribution of constituencies in Scotland; what is the average electorate of constituencies in Scotland; and when the Constituency Boundary Commission will next report upon constituencies in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no proposals for the redistribution of constituencies in Scotland. It is the statutory duty of the Boundary Commission for Scotland to submit proposals to him every 10 to 15 years. The commission's next report must be submitted between February 1993 and February 1998. The average electorate of constituencies in Scotland is 54,624.

Registers

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he holds about the use made of electoral registers in the compiling of the community charge registers currently operating in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: Section 17(2) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 1988, provides that community charges registration officers shall, for the purpose of discharging their functions, have access to and the use of any information which electoral registration officers for their areas may have acquired in connection with any of their functions. In Scotland the community charges registration officers are also the electoral registration officers. I have no information about the uses made of electoral registers by individual community charges registration officers.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Highlands and Islands Development Board, *(c)* the Scottish Development Agency, *(d)* the Forestry Commission, *(e)* the police and fire services, *(f)* local authorities and *(g)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Rifkind: The number and value of vehicles purchased by the Scottish Office, the Highlands and Islands Development Board, the Scottish Development Agency, the Forestry Commission and other public sector agencies for which I am responsible, is set out in the table.

Department	*Number*	*Value (£)*
The Scottish Office	119	932,532
Highlands and Islands Development Board	1	18,537
Scottish Development Agency	7	63,708
Forestry Commission[1]	68	448,642
Other Public Sector Agencies	50	406,899
	245	

[1] The Forestry Commission figures show purchases of vehicles for use throughout Great Britain.

Of these vehicles, 226 were United Kingdom-produced on the definition employed by the Department of Trade and Industry for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom-produced if the United Kingdom context exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value.

Information on the number and value of vehicles purchased for the police/fire services and local authorities is not held centrally and cannot be obtained without disproportionate costs.

Artificial Limbs

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the implications of the intended closure in June of the Dundee operation of the artificial limb manufacturers Robert Kellie and Son Ltd. on the services provided by the limb-fitting centre in Broughty Ferry, Dundee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Although Robert Kellie and Son Ltd. formerly supplied all artificial lower limbs provided by the limb fitting centre in Broughty Ferry, Dundee, the firm declined to tender for the contract which started on 1

January 1989 and now supplies only conventional metal limbs (on sub-contract to the main supplier of lower limbs to the centre). These metal limbs are no longer prescribed for new amputees, who are fitted with modular limbs of a more modern design. Many other amputees are changing to modular limbs. But it is important that conventional metal limbs should be available for the diminishing number of patients who need them. Arrangements will therefore be made, before the intended closure of Robert Kellie and Son Ltd., to find another source of suitable limbs.

Interception of Communications

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the illegal interception of communications in Helensburgh; and if he will bring forward further legislation to prevent such incidents.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: One. The interception of communications is subject to the provisions of the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

Employment Training

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make it his policy that present Training Agency policies on health and safety, equal opportunities for people with disabilities and ethnic minorities will continue through local agencies and Scottish Enterprise;

(2) what arrangements through local agencies and Scottish Enterprise will be put in place to ensure *(a)* people with learning difficulties and *(b)* the long-term unemployed will be effectively catered for;

(3) what arrangements will apply to ensure that private employers on local agencies boards will not have vested interests in the local agencies' expenditure decisions;

(4) what arrangements he proposes for independent monitoring of *(a)* the quality of Scottish Enterprise delivered training and outturns and *(b)* local agency delivered training and outturns;

(5) whether civil servants on secondment to local agencies or Scottish Enterprise will be able to alert Ministers to any financial irregularities that they find in *(a)* local agencies, *(b)* Scottish Enterprise, *(c)* contracts training providers and *(d)* other contracts;

(6) what arrangements he intends to introduce to ensure that quality training is provided by local agencies;

(7) if he will make it his policy that the employment rehabilitation service in Scotland will remain as part of the United Kingdom employment rehabilitation service run through the Training Agency.

Mr. Lang: We are currently reassessing the proposals in the Scottish Enterprise White Paper in the light of all the responses received, and will announce our detailed decisions in due course.

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money was spent on the bill-board advertisement covering Sainsbury's plc participation in the employment training scheme in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The Employment Training bill-board campaign featuring Sainsburys, IBM and Wimpey ran throughout Great Britain in January and March. The cost of £660,000 cannot be broken down to attribute expenditure to Scotland or to individual companies.

Brook Street Bureau

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what experience the Brook Street Bureau has of providing services for long-term unemployed in areas similar to Ferguslie Park, Paisley.

Mr. Lang: Brook Street has experience of providing job placements for a wide range of clients.

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will provide details of the amount of public money paid to fund the private initiative in the Ferguslie Park area of Paisley by the Brook Street Bureau;

(2) if he will provide details of the contract between his Department and the Brook Street Bureau for the provision of employment services in Ferguslie Park, Paisley.

Mr. Lang: Brook Street will be entering into a contract with the Scottish Development Agency in connection with the provision of job placement services for the Ferguslie Park training, employment and enterprise development company which is being set up by the Ferguslie Park partnership, implementing the joint strategy for the regeneration of Ferguslie Park. The details of that contract are commercially confidential; payments are related directly to the number of residents placed in work, and the majority of Brook Street's income will come not from the public sector but from employers' placement fees.

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what parts of the employment service his Department fails to provide and Brook Street Bureau will fulfil;

(2) whether the Ferguslie Park decision has any implications for the future of the employment service on a local and national basis.

Mr. Lang: The future of the employment service is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. The job placement services offered by Brook Street as part of the Ferguslie Park training, employment and enterprise development company will complement those provided by the employment service.

Area Manpower Boards

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the possible and actual attendance of the private sector representatives on area manpower boards, for each area manpower board, for the last full year that those boards were in operation.

Mr. Lang: Details of attendance by private sector representatives on area manpower boards from October 1987 to September 1988 are as follows:

	Possible	*Actual*
Central and Fife	50	27
Highlands and Islands	55	38
Grampian and Tayside	53	33
Lothian and Borders	55	26
Dumfries and Galloway	60	24
Ayrshire	55	26
Glasgow	60	36
Lanarkshire	60	31
Renfrewshire, Dunbartonshire and Argyll	66	30

YTS

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether YTS trainees, currently aged over 18 years, who stay at home receive any additional payment to cover their 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge.

Mr. Lang: YTS trainees who are 18 years old or over will be eligible to apply for a rebate on the full community charge, up to a maximum of 80 per cent., depending on their income and personal circumstances. YTS allowances have not been increased to take account of the community charge.

Training and Employment Grant Scheme

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the Scottish Development Agency, and when his Department will be in a position to publish conclusions, on a revised training and employment grant scheme for Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Development Agency has submitted for approval proposals for the implementation of a revised training and employment grant scheme. My officials are considering and evaluating the proposals with agency staff. I will shortly be in a position to decide whether the new scheme should be implemented. The TEGS 8 scheme, which was due to end on 31 March, is continuing to operate in the meantime.

Storm Damage

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is in a position to make an announcement on compensation for storm damage to be paid to Scottish local authorities and others.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend wrote to Highland regional and Inverness district councils on 10 February requesting detailed reports of flood damage and extra costs incurred. Highland region replied on 6 March and Inverness district on 6 April. All district councils were asked to report costs incurred in dealing with the effects of the storm on housing. The information received from these and other sources is now being assessed. My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to make a statement shortly.

Tobacco (Sales to Children)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to take any further steps to enforce section 2 of the Protection of Children (Tobacco) Act 1986 in relation to the sale of individual cigarettes to young people under the age of 16 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The enforcement of the law is a matter for the police. Chief constables in determining the deployment of resources to combat any particular problem have regard to the overall policing needs of their areas.

Scottish Homes Leaflet

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the factual inaccuracies contained in the leaflet, "Introducing Scottish Homes: Your New Landlord"; and what steps he proposes to take to ensure that tenants receive correct information.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* I have already conveyed to Scottish Homes the importance which I attach to the provision of comprehensive and accurate information to tenants. It is the responsibility of Scottish Homes to satisfy itself as to the factual accuracy of its own material. I shall, however, pass to the chairman of Scottish Homes any comments about the leaflet which the hon. Member may care to draw to my attention.

Health Boards (Membership)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of members of the Highland health board and the date of appointment and nominating body of each member.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* The information requested is as follows:

Highland Health Board

Name	*Date of first appointment*	*Nominated by*
Members appointed to 31 March 1991		
Mr. G. Bruce	1 April 1987	Caithness Local Health Council
Mr. M. Cumming	1 April 1987	Scottish Trades Union Congress
Dr. R. S. C. Ferguson	1 April 1985	BMA: Local Medical Committee
Mrs. C. B. Fraser	1 April 1987	Ross and Cromarty District Council: Council of Voluntary Services
Dr. C. A. S. Galloway	1 April 1987	BMA: Royal College of Surgeons
Mr. W. G. Johnston	1 April 1983	Sutherland Local Health Council
Mrs. V. MacIver	1 April 1987	Ross and Cromarty District Council
Mr. A. K. Robertson	1 April 1987	Area Dental Committee of Highland Health Board
Mrs. C. Thomson	1 April 1987	Ross and Cromarty Local Health Council
Members appointed to 31 March 1983		
Mrs. H. E. Betts-Brown	1 April 1985	Highland Health Board
Mr. J. Forbes, JP	1 April 1989	Lord Sanderson
Mr. J. G. Ligertwood	1 April 1989	Highland Health Board
Mr. B. A. Merchant	22 June 1981	Highland Health Board
Mrs. S. M. C. South	1 April 1985	Highland Health Board
Mrs. S. G. H. Stone	1 April 1989	Ross and Cromarty District Council

Name	Date of first appointment	Nominated by
Miss I. Urquhart	1 April 1989	Highland Health Board
Mr. R. Stewart	1 April 1989	General Manager; appointed to the Board in accordance with paragraph 10.20 of the White Paper "Working for Patients" (Cm. 555).

Farmers' Income

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farmers in Scotland received annual incomes from farming of *(a)* less than £4,999, *(b)* £5,000 to £7,499, *(c)* £7,500 to £9,999, *(d)* £10,000 to £14,999, *(e)* £15,000 to £19,999 and *(f)* over £20,000, respectively, for the latest convenient year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* The information set out in the table for 1987-88 approximates as closely as possible to the income ranges for which information is sought and is estimated from a sample of accounts covering most types of full-time farm. The sample does not cover intensive and mixed farms and a small number of very large farms is also excluded.

Net farm income range £	Number of farms
less than 5,000	6,600
5,000 to 6,999	1,400
7,000 to 9,999	2,500
10,000 to 14,999	1,900
15,000 to 19,999	1,500
20,000 and over	3,000

Net farm income is the reward to the farmer and his wife for their manual work and for running the farm, and the return on their investment in stock and machinery.

Agricultural Holdings

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest available estimate of the income per agriculture holding in Scotland *(a)* including non-agricultural income and *(b)* excluding such income.

Mr. Rifkind: Information about non-agricultural income is available only from a one per cent. sample of the tax records of individuals registered as having a self-employment income from agriculture and horticulture. For the 1985-86 assessment year, the latest available, the average total income per farmer was £11,845, and the average agricultural and horticultural income was £6,368.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 18 April 1989

ENVIRONMENT

River Conservation

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken to ensure that the national freshwater quality classification scheme will consider the conservation status of rivers, in terms of their ability to support and maintain aquatic plant and animal communities.

Mr. Howard: The existing classification schemes for rivers and estuaries are currently under review and my right hon. Friend will be publishing a consultation paper on possible revisions later in the spring. The paper will address the ability of watercourses to support aquatic flora and fauna.

Pollution

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain a copy of "Pollution-Controlling the Problems" and "Nuclear Waste and Radiation Risks" recently published by the Association of District Councils for his departmental library; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Copies of these two reports are in the Department's library. We have taken note of their contents.

Pyrton Depot Site

Mr. Heseltine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the residual land on the depot site in the parish of Pyrton in Oxfordshire is surplus to the Crown's requirements; and what plans he has to return it to agricultural use.

Mr. Ridley: The depot site is surplus to the Crown's requirements. There are no plans to return it to agricultural use.

Mr. Heseltine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Property Services Agency will relinquish rights assumed in wartime over the depot site in Pyrton, Oxfordshire.

Mr. Ridley: No. Rights were not assumed in wartime. Records show that rights were established before the war when the buildings were erected.

Mr. Heseltine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of any documents held by *(a)* the Property Services Agency and *(b)* his Department, relating to the acquisition, planning status, construction, rating and occupancy of the depot site in the parish of Pyrton in the county of Oxfordshire which have not been released to the Public Record Office.

Mr. Ridley: I have arranged for copies of such documents to be placed in the Library.

Departmental Circulars

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many circulars from his Department since 1970 have dealt with land needs for *(a)* housing, *(b)* employment, *(c)* shopping and *(d)* outdoor recreation.

Mr. Ridley: I invite my hon. Friend to refer to my Department's "Planning Guidance: Index of Extant Circulars", a copy of which is in the Library. The index lists seven circulars, two development control policy notes and two planning policy guidance notes relating to housing development; two circulars relating to employment; three circulars and one planning policy guidance note relating to retail development; and three circulars relating to sport and recreation.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which urban development corporations have signed agency agreements with local authorities for development control work, and which urban development corporations are using consultants for development control work.

Mr. Trippier: All urban development corporations, other than Bristol and London Docklands, have agency agreements with their local authorities for development control work. Bristol DC uses consultants for this work; London Docklands DC uses in-house staff.

Housing

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes were built by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* housing associations in 1988.

Mr. Trippier: It is provisionally estimated that there were 15,300 local authority completions and 9,200 housing association completions in 1988.

Multiple Occupation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate any changes he proposes to make following his consultation exercise in 1988 on houses in multiple occupation.

Mr. Trippier: Possible changes are still under consideration.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to monitor problems arising from the new regulations on fixing of rent levels for houses in multiple occupation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: We shall monitor the impact of the new private renting regime in relation to all types of dwelling, including houses in multiple occupation.

Housing Investment (Stockton)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what housing investment programme allocation has been made to the borough of Stockton-on-Tees in the current year.

Mr. Trippier: Details of local authorities' housing investment programme allocations for 1989-90 were announced on 8 December 1988. Stockton-on-Tees borough council's allocation is £2,241,500 which includes £37,500 for the homes insulation scheme.

Capital Receipts (Stockton)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what capital receipts were available to the borough of Stockton-on-Tees at the beginning of the current financial year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not yet available.

Housing Projects (Stockton)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estate action and other housing projects his Department is undertaking in Stockton-on-Tees.

Mr. Trippier: Two ongoing housing schemes, on the Clarences and Eastbourne estates, are being supported by estate action resources in 1989-90.

Shopping Areas

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about neglect of shopping areas awaiting redevelopment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: This issue is sometimes raised in the context of development plan policies, individual planning applications and proposals for inner-city regeneration. The most recent representations are those raised by my hon. Friend in the Adjournment debate on 10 April, to which I replied.

Roman Remains

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the significance of and need to safeguard the Roman remains discovered on the Hammerson Group site, Cannon street.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: English Heritage has informally advised that the existing consent will enable satisfactory recording of the majority of the archaeological remains. It is in touch with the developers and the Museum of London. To date we have received no other representations.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take immediate action to safeguard the Roman remains discovered on the Hammerson Group site, Cannon street.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Scheduling ensures that any works to the site require scheduled monument consent. Our information is that some of the remains will be destroyed but most of these areas were already partly damaged by the foundations of the previous building. The scheduled monument consent granted in December 1988 allowed for preservation by record of this part of the site. The majority of the remains, some 75 to 80 per cent. will be preserved beneath adjoining buildings.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the historic significance of the Roman remains discovered on the Hammerson Group site, near Cannon street station; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The site was scheduled in June 1986, being one of the largest Roman baths found in Britain. Recent discoveries have confirmed the existence of extensive and high quality remains.

Amusement Arcades

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been received seeking a tightening of the town and country planning law relating to amusement arcades; and whether the Government have any plans for future amendments to the law.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about planning decisions affecting amusement centres. Although some people regard them as socially or morally undesirable, amusement centres are a lawful use of land, and any applications for planning permission to establish them must be judged on their merits in terms of their land use planning implications. I do not consider that any amendment of planning law would be appropriate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is responsible for the licensing arrangements under the Gaming Act 1968, and for byelaws under the Public Health Act 1961, which regulate the operation of amusement centres.

Teesside Development Corporation

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funding has recently been awarded to the Teesside development corporation; and for what projects it has been allocated.

Mr. Trippier: The external financing limit of the Teesside development corporation in 1989-90 has been agreed at £34 million. The corporation will continue to fund a number of major projects, including the redevelopment of the Teesdale area and the Tees offshore base.

Good progress has been made on the reclamation of the Teesdale site, the proposals for which include housing, offices and leisure facilities. The comprehensive redevelopment of this site will require the construction of a new bridge and barrage across the River Tees. These schemes are the subject of a Private Bill which was laid before Parliament in November last year.

The Tees offshore base is being developed as a joint venture between Teesside development corporation and the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. A number of major companies have already located at the base which is expected to provide 1,000 new jobs by the end of 1989.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Health and Safety

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons

Commission, what rights exist for safety representatives to inspect and take copies of accident reports and statistics in the House of Commons.

Mr. Beith: There is no restriction on safety representatives who are members of the House of Commons Safety Committee, inspecting and taking copies of accident reports and statistics in the House.

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what health and safety training is being provided for young workers in the House of Commons.

Mr. Beith: The accepted definition of "young workers" is those between 16 and 18 years of age. The House does not employ staff in this category. Training in health and safety is available, however, to staff of the House as part of the general training programme organised on a departmental level.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many industrial injuries were sustained by workers in the House by category in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Beith: Information on reported accidents which have been classified as industrial injuries is not readily available. The number of reported accidents from 1979 to date is as follows:

	House of Commons staff	*Property Services agency staff*
1979	n/a	24
1980	n/a	23
1981	64	26
1982	40	31
1983	49	19
1984	67	23
1985	45	22
1986	47	22
1987	29	30
1988	36	10

n/a = not available

Fire Drills

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, when the House of Commons last held a fire drill.

Mr. Beith: Thursday 16 February 1989.

Members' Cloakroom (Losses)

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Lord President of the Council what have been the reported losses of property from the House of Commons Members' cloakroom in 1988 and 1989 to date.

Mr. Wakeham: A coat, a cap and umbrella, and some champagne were reported lost from the House of Commons Members' Cloakroom in 1988. The coat was subsequently found. A blue holdall is the only reported loss, to date, this year.

Organic Food

Dr. David Clark: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, answering on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, what is the policy of the House of Commons Commission on the purchase of organic food for sale in the restaurants of the House of Commons.

Mr. Beith: Direct responsibility for the purchase of foodstuffs for use in the House lies not with the Commission but with the General Manager of the Refreshment Department, whose policy is to purchase adequate and regular supplies of good quality food at reasonable prices. It is understood that the Refreshment Department will use organic foods whenever these criteria are satisfactorily met.

Visitors (Shelter)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will list in specific terms the difficulties currently preventing more satisfactory arrangements for parties of visitors to the Palace of Westminster to shelter from inclement weather while queueing to join the Line of Route; what steps are being taken to overcome these difficulties; and when the issue will be finally resolved and new arrangements put in place.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 17 April 1989. It would not be appropriate at this stage for me to identify the difficulties involved or the steps being taken to resolve them. However, it is hoped that mutually acceptable arrangements will be agreed shortly and that these new arrangements will be put in place as soon as possible thereafter.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Special Needs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average annual cost of *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special needs pupils in the United Kingdom for the year 1987-88; and what is the average cost per pupil in Durham for *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special needs for the same year.

Mr. Butcher: The available information is given in the table.

Net Institutional Expenditure[1] per pupil[2]—1987-88

	Nursery and primary schools	*Secondary schools*	*Special education*
	£	£	£
Durham	1,050	1,405	4,620
England	1,010	1,520	4,925

[1] Net institutional expenditure includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

[2] The figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DoE and pupil number returns to DES.

Information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Alcohol and Drugs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what programmes exist which teach children about *(a)* the dangers of alcohol, *(b)* the dangers of smoking and *(c)* the dangers of illegal drugs; and if there is evidence of local education authorities encouraging their schools to run any such schemes.

Mr. Butcher: An increasing number of schools now provide pupils with education about the dangers associated with alcohol and drug misuse and cigarette smoking. Such education programmes have increased as a result of Government and LEA funding of drugs education co-ordinators and in-service training for teachers. The order recently laid for science in the national curriculum makes specific provision for the teaching of different aspects of health education, including education about alcohol, drugs and smoking.

Teacher Numbers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what per cent. of teachers trained in United Kingdom in the years 1970 to the latest date available remain in the profession for at least five years and 10 years.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information is not available in the precise form requested. However, on the basis of teacher entry, wastage and re-entry rates for the year ending March 1986 (the latest for which figures are available), it can be estimated that 61 per cent. of those completing initial teacher training in England and Wales are in full-time service in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England and Wales five years later. The proportion in service 10 years after qualification is 47 per cent. Thereafter, the numbers leaving and re-entering service are in balance, so that the proportion in service 20 years after qualification is still 47 per cent.

Broadcast Loan Scheme

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has considered making extra funds available to the Open university to allow for the reintroduction of the broadcast loan scheme.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend announced on 2 November last year an increase in the Open university's grant of £4·2 million in the financial year 1989-90 and similar additions for the next two years. The detailed allocation of these additional resources within the undergraduate programme is a matter for the university. It is receiving £68·4 million in recurrent grant in 1989.

School Building Replacement Scheme

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money he has allocated in each of the last five years to local education authorities in respect of the school building replacement programme; and if he will make a statement on the criteria he applies in reaching decisions about the allocation of funds to the replacement programme.

Mr. Butcher: Local education authorities are responsible for the maintenance of school buildings. Under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, each year authorities receive block allocations of prescribed expenditure for the main service blocks, including education, but it is for them to decide how to spend their allocations. My right hon. Friend sets the local education authorities' allocations of prescribed expenditure for education. In formulating these capital allocations, priority is given to committed expenditure up to the levels previously indicated to authorities, new projects to meet population growth and new projects to remove surplus places in the schools sector. Any remaining funds are allocated for improvement and replacement projects. In accordance with the criteria the allocations for schools in the last five years are set out in the table.

£ million

	County and voluntary controlled schools	*Voluntary aided and special agreement schools*
1985-86	230·0	35·3
1986-87	232·9	27·8
1987-88	254·0	39·1
1988-89	319·0	47·1
1989-90	311·4	56·1

Notes:

1. The table provides details of the notional schools capital allocation.
2. The allocations shown are those announced before the start of the financial year in question and do not include subsequent revisions.

Rating Reform

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his best estimate of the numbers of young people in further or higher education or on Government training schemes under the age of 25 years who will be liable for at least 20 per cent. of the community in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England and Wales.

Mr. Jackson: All students (excluding school pupils) aged 18 to 24 will be liable for at least 20 per cent. of community charge. In 1987-88 there were some 110,000 full-time and part-time students aged 18 to 24, excluding those on training courses, studying in Scotland and 970,000 in England and Wales. The Training Agency estimates that in 1987-88 there were on average 6,000 people aged 18 or over on the youth training scheme in Scotland and 71,000 in England and Wales. In addition, 12,000 trainees aged 18 to 24 started on employment training in Scotland and 78,000 in England and Wales between 5 September 1988 and 31 March 1989.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of educational establishments in the Greater London area which will require certification officers for the introduction of the community charge in April 1990 and *(b)* the number of students who will require certification in the Greater London area.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is estimated that, excluding private and independent establishments, there are 114 educational establishments within the area of the London boroughs which will require certification officers for the introduction of the community charge. There is no reliable estimate of the numbers of independent and private establishments requiring certification officers. It is not possible to give an accurate estimate of the numbers of students requiring certification for community charge purposes within the

area of the London boroughs because the criteria for registration as a student do not coincide with categories of students for whom figures are collected.

University Posts

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to ensure that applicants for academic and non-academic university posts are interviewed by a selection committee whose chairman does not enjoy sole executive authority.

Mr. Jackson: That is a matter for the universities.

Pupil—Teacher Ratios

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the current pupil—teacher ratios for both primary and secondary education in each local education authority.

Mr. Butcher: In January 1988 the pupil—teacher ratios in maintaned primary and secondary schools in each local education authority in England were as follows:

Pupil teacher ratios by LEA January 1988

	Primary Pupil: teacher ratio	*Secondary Pupil: teacher ratio*
Barking	20·9	14·7
Barnet	20·1	14·2
Bexley	22·4	16·0
Brent	18·5	11·1
Bromley	23·0	15·8
Croydon	21·8	15·1
Ealing	19·3	13·9
Enfield	21·7	15·1
Haringey	19·0	11·9
Harrow	21·8	15·6
Havering	22·6	15·1
Hillingdon	22·0	15·6
Hounslow	20·1	14·9
Kingston upon Thames	21·5	14·2
Merton	21·6	15·9
Newham	21·5	14·1
Redbridge	24·0	16·1
Richmond upon Thames	20·9	15·5
Sutton	22·7	16·5
Waltham Forest	21·2	11·8
Inner London	17·6	13·1
Birmingham	23·2	16·0
Coventry	22·5	14·4
Dudley	22·7	14·0
Sandwell	22·4	14·0
Solihull	23·1	15·5
Walsall	20·8	13·9
Wolverhampton	20·1	13·8
Knowsley	20·7	13·4
Liverpool	21·0	14·4
St. Helens	22·3	14·0
Sefton	23·2	16·1
Wirral	21·6	15·7
Bolton	22·9	15·1
Bury	22·4	15·0
Manchester	21·4	12·9
Oldham	22·4	15·5
Rochdale	22·3	14·1
Salford	21·7	13·8
Stockport	23·3	15·0
Tameside	23·4	15·5
Trafford	21·9	14·8
Wigan	21·2	13·6
Barnsley	21·6	15·2
Doncaster	21·4	15·4
Rotherham	21·2	15·3
Sheffield	19·9	14·0
Bradford	19·8	15·2
Calderdale	22·8	15·5
Kirklees	20·9	15·0
Leeds	20·0	14·7
Wakefield	21·8	15·2
Gateshead	20·7	14·6
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	19·7	13·8
North Tyneside	18·6	12·9
South Tyneside	20·6	14·3
Sunderland	22·1	15·1
Isles of Scilly	13·1	9·1
Avon	23·8	16·4
Bedfordshire	22·0	16·8
Berkshire	23·4	16·0
Buckinghamshire	24·0	16·2
Cambridgeshire	23·4	16·2
Cheshire	23·6	16·2
Cleveland	22·3	15·1
Cornwall	23·4	16·3
Cumbria	21·7	14·9
Derbyshire	21·2	14·4
Devon	23·3	16·6
Dorset	23·3	16·3
Durham	22·0	16·0
East Sussex	22·7	16·2
Essex	22·7	16·6
Gloucestershire	22·6	16·0
Hampshire	22·5	16·2
Hereford and Worcester	23·7	16·6
Hertfordshire	21·7	15·4
Humberside	22·2	15·0
Isle of Wight	23·5	16·4
Kent	24·0	16·4
Lancashire	23·3	15·6
Leicestershire	22·9	15·0
Lincolnshire	23·9	16·6
Norfolk	22·6	15·9
North Yorkshire	22·0	15·9
Northamptonshire	22·9	16·1
Northumberland	22·8	16·1
Nottinghamshire	21·0	14·8
Oxfordshire	23·0	16·6
Shropshire	21·4	15·3
Somerset	23·1	16·3
Staffordshire	23·2	16·3
Suffolk	22·4	16·7
Surrey	21·4	15·4
Warwickshire	21·9	16·0
West Sussex	22·9	16·7
Wiltshire	22·6	15·4
England	22·0	15·4

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in tabular form *(a)* the number of teachers in each local education authority in England and Wales, *(b)* the number of pupils in each and *(c)* the pupil-teacher ratio of each.

Mr. Butcher *[pursuant to his answer, 11 April 1989, c. 428.]:* The figures for England are as follows. Corresponding figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon.. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Pupils, Teachers and PTR's by LEA January 1988

Local Education Authority	*Total FTE Pupils*	*Total FTE Teachers*	*Pupil/ Teacher ratios*
Barking	22,615	1,388	16·3
Barnet	39,078	2,545	15·4
Bexley	31,480	1,783	17·7
Brent	32,136	2,523	12·7
Bromley	35,033	1,979	17·7
Croydon	41,475	2,541	16·3
Ealing	36,445	2,346	15·5
Enfield	37,304	2,255	16·5
Haringey	25,026	1,827	13·7
Harrow	25,170	1,471	17·1
Havering	35,533	2,157	16·5
Hillingdon	30,839	1,808	17·1
Hounslow	29,681	1,863	15·9
Kingston upon Thames	16,621	1,063	15·6
Merton	20,242	1,268	16·0
Newham	33,862	2,281	14·8
Redbridge	29,574	1,664	17·8
Richmond upon Thames	15,992	958	16·7
Sutton	21,668	1,250	17·3
Waltham Forest	29,644	2,184	13·6
Birmingham	166,487	9,575	17·4
Coventry	46,820	2,895	16·2
Dudley	44,721	2,713	16·5
Sandwell	47,655	2,842	16·8
Solihull	32,633	1,859	17·6
Walsall	45,199	2,831	16·0
Wolverhampton	39,795	2,598	15·3
Knowsley	26,398	1,670	15·8
Liverpool	75,461	4,701	16·1
St. Helens	30,051	1,819	16·5
Sefton	44,397	2,419	18·4
Wirral	50,463	2,950	17·1
Bolton	43,365	2,567	16·9
Bury	25,578	1,509	17·0
Manchester	67,376	4,445	15·2
Oldham	37,224	2,218	16·8
Rochdale	34,648	2,207	15·7
Salford	36,042	2,108	17·1
Stockport	42,922	2,529	17·0
Tameside	34,839	1,878	18·6
Trafford	28,088	1,706	16·5
Wigan	50,753	3,284	15·5
Barnsley	33,998	2,012	16·9
Doncaster	47,000	2,799	16·8
Rotherham	41,776	2,488	16·8
Sheffield	70,448	4,524	15·6
Bradford	79,596	4,946	16·1
Calderdale	31,271	1,837	17·0
Kirklees	60,719	3,725	16·3
Leeds	103,174	6,574	15·8
Wakefield	47,421	2,865	16·6
Gateshead	29,415	1,842	16·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	38,401	2,513	15·3
North Tyneside	29,625	2,082	14·2
South Tyneside	23,594	1,437	16·4
Sunderland	48,987	2,832	17·3
Isles of Scilly	279	27	10·3
Inner London	269,994	20,020	13·5
Avon	130,030	7,121	18·3
Bedfordshire	81,988	4,772	17·2
Berkshire	104,683	5,890	17·8
Buckinghamshire	92,589	4,949	18·7
Cambridgeshire	95,504	5,110	18·7
Cheshire	150,143	8,362	18·0
Cleveland	96,211	5,480	17·6
Cornwall	66,779	3,744	17·8
Cumbria	72,926	4,407	16·5
Derbyshire	137,654	8,353	16·5
Devon	129,531	7,109	18·2
Dorset	79,911	4,480	17·8
Durham	91,765	5,019	18·3
East Sussex	79,267	4,445	17·8
Essex	223,116	11,969	18·6
Gloucestershire	73,987	4,193	17·6
Hampshire	208,983	11,674	17·9
Hereford and Worcester	94,764	5,273	18·0
Hertfordshire	146,085	8,828	16·5
Humberside	136,026	7,895	17·2
Isle of Wight	16,606	973	17·1
Kent	216,556	11,784	18·4
Lancashire	208,597	11,828	17·6
Leicestershire	135,891	7,658	17·7
Lincolnshire	82,384	4,556	18·1
Norfolk	101,307	5,527	18·3
North Yorkshire	97,533	5,548	17·6
Northamptonshire	92,508	5,236	17·7
Northumberland	47,362	2,684	17·6
Nottinghamshire	146,479	8,702	16·8
Oxfordshire	71,946	4,103	17·5
Shropshire	60,732	3,595	16·9
Somerset	62,256	3,379	18·4
Staffordshire	157,255	8,746	18·0
Suffolk	88,751	4,929	18·0
Surrey	120,234	6,946	17·3
Warwickshire	70,929	4,085	17·4
West Sussex	89,580	4,817	18·6
Wiltshire	77,496	4,371	17·7
ENGLAND	6,832,378	401,507	17·0

CIVIL SERVICE

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Office.

Mr. Luce: Senior grades in my Department are recruited by the Civil Service Commission. The commission has recently run publicity campaigns aimed at increasing awareness amongst ethnic minorities of career opportunities in the Civil Service. The commission monitors the ethnic origin of all applicants.

THE ARTS

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister for the Arts what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Luce: Senior grades in my Department are recruited by the Civil Service Commission. The commission has recently run publicity campaigns aimed at increasing awareness amongst ethnic minorities of career opportunities in the Civil Service. The commission monitors the ethnic origin of all applicants.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Local Authority Income

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent his Department has studied the possibility of replacing locally collected local authority income with a hypothecated amount within the income tax system; and if he will list such research or studies which have taken place over the last 10 years.

Mr. Major: This approach of "assigned revenues" has been considered and rejected in successive studies of local

government finance, most recently in the 1983 White Paper "Rates: Proposals for rate limitation and reform of the rating system" (Cmnd. 9008). It is not the practice of the Government to hypothecate revenues from a particular tax to particular areas of expenditure.

11 Downing Street (Works of Art)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing *(a)* the works of art, objects or artefacts currently on loan from national museums and galleries at 11 Downing street, *(b)* the museum or gallery from whose collections they are loaned and *(c)* the term of each loan.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 17 April 1989]*: The works of art on loan to No. 11 Downing street from galleries are as follows. Details of the terms of loan for each painting can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

National Portrait Gallery
Painting—Shackleton John—Pelham, Henry (C1695-1754) Prime Minister C1752
Painting—Long Edwin—Iddesleigh, Stafford Henry Northcote, 1st EARL (1818-87)
Painting—Watts George Frederick—Sherbrooke, Robert Lowe, 1st Visc. (1811-92) Chanc/Exch
Painting—Hall Sydney Prior—Gladstone, William Ewart (1809-98) Prime Minister
Painting—Childers Emily Maria—Childers, Hugh Culling Eardley (1827-96) Statesman
Painting—Sargent John Singer—Hill, Octavia (1838-1912), Social Reformer
Painting—Millais John Everett—Beaconsfield, Benjamin Disraeli, Earl (1804-81)

National Gallery
Painting—Zais Giuseppe—Landscape with a Ruined Tower
Painting—Corot J. B. C.—The Waggon-Souvenir of Saintry 1874
Painting—Hobbema Meyndert—A Stream by a Wood
Painting—Bakhuisen Ludolf—A Beach Scene with Fishermen
Painting—Corot J. B. C.—Souvenir of a Journey to Coubron
Painting—Corot J. B. C.—A Flood

Tate Gallery
Painting—Opie John—Reynolds, Mrs. S. W.
Painting—Anon 18C British School—Family Group in a Landscape
Painting—Orpen William—Orpen, Lady
Painting—Laszlo Philip A. De—Wantage, Lady
Painting—Orchardson William Q.—Her First Dance
Painting—Raeburn Henry—Fraser, Pringle
Painting—Raeburn Henry—Lauzun, Mrs. H. W.
Painting—Gainsborough Thomas—Blackstone, Sir William

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been removed from the United Kingdom at the expense of the carriers under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987, by country of destination.

Mr. Renton: None. The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 does not contain powers to remove people from the United Kingdom.

Rape and Child Abuse

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of his Department towards encouraging courts in England and Wales to allow rape or child abuse victims to give their evidence behind screens to try to stop intimidation of such people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the courts to decide in the circumstances of each case whether or not to use screens. In addition, section 32 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 enables children under the age of 14 to give evidence by live television link from outside the courtroom in trials on indictment for violent and sexual offences. An advisory group chaired by his honour Judge Thomas Pigot QC is considering whether video-recorded evidence by children and other vulnerable witnesses should be admissible in criminal proceedings, and we look forward to receiving its report in the summer. We will examine any proposals for further protecting witnesses from courtroom intimidation in the light of group's findings.

Human Rights

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights in England; and which organisations made these representations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Representations are regularly received, both from individuals and organisations, which might be interpreted as alleging violations or denials of human rights in relation to specific cases or generally. No central record is kept of such representations or of the organisations making them.

Police Sporting Schemes

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of whether police schemes for providing young people with purposeful activity of a sporting nature during their leisure time or vacation provided any evidence of a reduction in criminal referrals; how many such schemes are in operation; and what assessment has been made as to the costs of these schemes compared with the cost of referrals.

Mr. John Patten: There are no central records of schemes of this kind, although we are aware of many being run throughout the country, most of which draw local sponsorship and voluntary effort. It is for chief officers to decide whether to establish such schemes and to assess their value within the general cost-effective management of each force. One scheme, the Staffordshire police activity and community enterprise programme, (SPACE) in Staffordshire, has been the subject of a Home Office crime prevention unit paper which concluded that there was a possible link between SPACE and changes in the local crime pattern, but that other factors could also be involved. In Avon and Somerset, police schools liaison officers run over 100 different schemes and activities.

Homosexuality

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hornchurch, *Official Report*, 1 December 1988, column 396, what response he has had from the Law Officers in Jersey and the Isle of Man in respect of amending their laws on consensual homosexual acts between males.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The island authorities in Jersey and the Isle of Man have indicated that they have under consideration the question of legislation on this matter in order to enable them to conform with the European convention on human rights.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking on the recommendations of the National Association of Probation Officers recent report on the imprisonment of women with dependent children, a copy of which he has been sent.

Mr. John Patten: We published last year proposals for the development of non-custodial sentences. The national standards for community service orders, introduced on 1 April, ask probation areas to ensure that community service placements are available for women offenders, including those who are pregnant and those with young children. A review is taking place of policies on mothers and babies in prison.

Guildford and Woolwich Pub Bombings

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost hitherto of the current investigation into the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings; how far this is apportioned between *(a)* the Home Office, *(b)* Avon and Somerset policy authority; how many officers are absent from duties in Avon and Somerset and whether full account is taken of this; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The inquiries by the Avon and Somerset constabulary into the new evidence which had been made available to my right hon. Friend in this case have been concluded. Following the issue of a writ the matter of costs is sub judice.

The case was referred to the Court of Appeal on 16 January and the conduct of the prosecution case now rests with the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Murders (Chinatown)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the progress of investigations into the recent murders in London's Chinatown.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The conduct of the investigation is a matter for the commissioner.

Single Market (Immigration)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect the single European market in 1992 will have on immigration arrangements for people from *(a)* Montserrat and *(b)* other British dependencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: None.

Drunkenness (Wiltshire)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Wiltshire as to the number of (i) soldiers and (ii) civilians arrested by Wiltshire constabulary in *(a)* Salisbury and *(b)* Amesbury and subsequently charged with being drunk and disorderly or causing a breach of the peace in each of the past 12 months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information available centrally relates to the number of persons found guilty or cautioned for offences of drunkenness in the Wiltshire police force area in 1987. This information was published in Home Office statistical bulletin 31/88, a copy of which is in the Library.

To produce such information for each month of 1987 would involve disproportionate cost. Information is not collected centrally on the occupation of persons found guilty or cautioned nor can the area breakdown requested be given. Information for 1988 is not yet available.

Immigration

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the number of *(a)* fiancés and *(b)* male spouses who have been refused entry clearance and had an appeal against that refusal turned down on more than one occasion over the last five years.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is not available; the information available centrally does not separately identify re-applicants.

Prisons (Overcrowding)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what positive practical proposals are being considered by his Department for continued or future support for schemes including bail support provision and other measures as a means of tackling overcrowding in *(a)* Her Majesty's prison Armley and *(b)* other prisons with a view to reducing the number of unconvicted young prisoners on remand; and what further measures he proposes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government continue to demonstrate their commitment to reducing the number of young people remanded in custody and to relieving prison overcrowding.

An extensive development programme is under way to provide 500 extra bail places at approved hostels by April 1991. The first two hostels in this programme are due to open shortly and one of these is in Bradford. We are considering proposals of establish further approved bail hostels in West Yorkshire.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is preparing improved training on bail decisions for magistrates. We are encouraging the development of bail information schemes which give courts better information on which to base decisions about bail. A scheme is proposed for Leeds and is now subject only to final approval.

By the mid-1990s over 25,000 new prison places will have been delivered by the prison building programme. The programme is frequently enhanced. We are now considering proposals to build two 300-place remand centres by 1991. One of these is at Everthorpe on Humberside. The building programme includes a refurbishment project at Her Majesty's prison Leeds which will increase its certified normal accommodation by 226 in 1992 and by 500 in 1997.

At the end of February this year there were over 600 fewer young prisoners on remand than 12 months previously.

Immigrants (Literacy Test)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce a language or literacy test for immigrants seeking to settle in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: We have no plans to apply such a test to those who wish to come to this country for settlement. But anyone wishing to acquire British citizenship by naturalisation is already subject to a language requirement.

Television Licence Fee

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what prior notice and publicity of the recent increase in TV licence fee charges was given *(a)* in Stoke on Trent North and *(b)* nationally.

Mr. Renton: The increase from 1 April 1989 was announced to the House by my right hon. Friend on 27 October 1988, and was widely reported. Counter grille notices were displayed at Post Offices from 20 March. Reminders were also enclosed with renewal notices for licences expiring on 31 March; though I understand that in some areas these were delayed in the post. The Post Office is inquiring into the reasons for this.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the level of TV licence fees *(a)* generally, *(b)* for the elderly and *(c)* for those in sheltered accommodation.

Mr. Renton: Increases in the standard licence fee will remain linked to RPI increases until April 1991. There are no plans to alter these arrangements before then. Licence fees for the elderly and those in sheltered accommodation have been discussed on a number of occasions, and we are not persuaded of the need for further review.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the police and fire services and *(c)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangements on content with the European Community.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* A total of 181 vehicles was purchased by the Home Office in 1988, at a cost of £1·95 million. Of these, 173 were described by the manufacturers as United Kingdom-produced, on the definition employed by the Department of Trade and Industry for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom-produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value.

Information on the country of origin of vehicles purchased by individual police forces and fire brigades and by public sector agencies is not held centrally. However, about 80 per cent. of the vehicles in use in the police service in 1988 are reported to be United Kingdom-produced.

War Crimes Inquiry

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to publish the forthcoming report of the war crimes inquiry, which is currently investigating persons suspected of involvement in Nazi crimes and now resident in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hurd *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* As I indicated to the House in exchanges following my statement on 8 February 1988 announcing the establishment of the inquiry, publication of its report will depend on the nature of its contents. I shall consider this matter carefully when I have received the report.

Amusement Machines

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the law governing licences for the installation of amusement machines; and whether the Government proposes to review the law in this area.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* We have received representations from a wide range of organisations and individuals concerning the provisions of the Gaming Act 1968 as they apply to amusement-with-prizes machines, in particular on the question of possible excessive involvement of children and young people in playing such machines. As a result we undertook a review, including research by the Home Office research and planning unit, during 1987-88 and we announced our conclusions on 28 July 1988 at columns *423-24*. The results of the research showed that, while for a small minority of young people public concern is well-founded, the scale of the problem does not justify legislation. We have, however, initiated various steps, including consultation with all interested parties, to deal with problems identified in the review.

We have also received representations to allow amusement-with-prizes machines in licensed betting offices, but have no current plans to do so.

Mr. K. Vinayagamoorthy and Mr. A. Anapatan

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the immigration and work permit status of the late Mr. Kandiahkanapathy Vinayagamoorthy and the late Mr. Ambikaipahan Anapatan.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Both men had been granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom, which entitled them to take employment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in the Department of Trade and Industry are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Forth: The figures as at 13 April 1989 are:

	Number	Percentage
(a) Women		
G1	Nil	—
G2	1	8·3
G3	3	5·4
G4	Nil	—
G5	24	10·9
G6	14	8·0
G7	110	11·4
All staff	5,974	43·4
(b) Ethnic minorities[1]		
G1-4	Nil	—
G5	2	0·9
G6	4	2·3
G7	16	1·7
All staff	1,147	8·3

[1] From 86 per cent. response to survey.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the Department of Trade and Industry last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: An ethnic survey of DTI staff was completed in April 1988. The resulting data base is continuously updated.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Forth: Recruitment to senior grades is normally conducted on the Department's behalf by the Civil Service Commission. On those few occasions when DTI recruits directly, the Department makes clear in its advertisements that it is an equal opportunity employer.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the future status of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory.

Mr. Forth: Today the National Weights and Measures Laboratory has been established as a next steps agency. The laboratory is responsible for ensuring that the measurement aspects of retail and wholesale trade are accurate and fair through its work to approve designs of equipment such as scales, petrol pumps and weighbridges. It will play an important role as the EC becomes a single market in 1992.

As an agency, the NWML will have increased financial and management freedoms to enable it to operate more effectively and efficiently. The change to agency status will give Dr. Peter Clapham, the chief executive, and the laboratory greater freedom to meet the challenges arising from the rapid development of technology as well as from the single European market.

The NWML remains part of the DTI and its 50 employees will continue to be civil servants. It will continue to serve both local authority customers and industry, as well as advising on technical matters relating to measurement and trade.

Details are set out in the laboratory's policy and resources framework document, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Single Market

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what effect the single European market in 1992 will have on trade arrangements with *(a)* Montserrat and *(b)* other British dependencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Removal of remaining internal trade barriers after 1992 will make it easier for everyone to do business throughout the Community. The Community will undoubtedly continue to offer preferential access to developing country products under the ACP/Lomé and other arrangements.

New Companies (Share Capital)

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of new companies formed in 1987 and 1988 had a nominal share capital of £100 and £100 to £1,000.

Mr. Maude: In 1987-88 a total of 38·3 per cent. of new companies in Great Britain were incorporated with nominal share capital of up to and including £100, and 0·5 per cent. with nominal share capital of over £100 and under £1,000. This and other information about companies is available from "Companies in 1987-88" a copy of which is in the Library.

Accounting Standards (Stock Exchange Letter)

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the text of his Department's letter to the stock exchange complaining about the exchange's publicly expressed hostility to the proposals of Sir Ronald Dearing in his report on the future making of accounting standards.

Mr. Maude: No. The hon. Member may have seen a further press release from the international Stock Exchange, which the Government welcome.

Arms Contracts (Losses)

Mr. Chris Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, on how many arms contracts losses have been incurred under the export credits guarantee scheme for each year since 1979; and what has been the total involved for each year.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Separate figures are only available for arms business underwritten on ECGD's section 2 (national interest) account. On this basis, total figures for premium, claims and recoveries are as follows:

Financial Year	*Premium £000's*	*Percentage of Total Premium received by ECGD*	*Claims £000's*	*Percentage of Total Claims paid by ECGD*	*Recoveries £000's*
1979-80	13,192	8·7	26,162	9·9	4,011
1980-81	6,357	4·2	31,684	10·9	3,847
1981-82	9,238	3·9	7,471	2·5	10,701
1982-83	12,196	3·5	5,183	0·9	4,012
1983-84	17,465	10·7	18,502	2·7	5,747
1984-85	10,754	6·7	10,445	1·2	924

Financial Year	Premium £000's	Percentage of Total Premium received by ECGD	Claims £000's	Percentage of Total Claims paid by ECGD	Recoveries £000's
1985-86	22,375	13·1	8,212	1·1	447
1986-87	20,667	13·0	29,909	3·8	594
1987-88	15,013	10·7	46,000	4·7	154

The figures relate to cash flows in the relevant financial year. Claims figures should not be equated with losses; in particular, substantial recoveries can be expected from the proceeds of on-going rescheduling agreements. The figures indicate that ECGD's general experience on this arms business has been better than on other trade sectors.

Vehicles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Post Office and *(c)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* My Department purchased 77 vehicles in 1988 at a total cost (including VAT) of £583,000. Seventy-six of these vehicles were produced in the United Kingdom on the basis of the definition employed by my Department for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value. Vehicle purchases by the Post Office are a matter for the board, and information relating to public bodies for which my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State is responsible is not available centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Transport and Energy Planning

Q28. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the co-ordination between the Departments of Transport, Environment and Energy, relating to transport planning and energy use matters; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is satisfied with the co-ordination between the Departments of Transport, Environment and Energy, relating to transport planning and energy use matters.

Q40. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding her recent visit to Africa.

Q46. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding her recent visit to Africa.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) earlier today.

NATO

Q59. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the 40th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Q77. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the 40th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Q100. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the 40th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has not received any recent representations on NATO's anniversary, although she is regularly involved in a range of matters regarding the United Kingdom's relationship with the allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Rastafarians

Q124. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the employment of Rastafarians in the public service.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

The policy of Her Majesty's Government is to afford equal opportunity for employment within the public service to all eligible persons. This requires that employees are selected on the basis of their ability, qualifications and fitness for work and that there is no discrimination on racial grounds. This policy applies to all ethnic groups.

United States President

Q182. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next intends to meet the President of the United States of America.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will see President Bush when he is in Europe for the NATO summit meeting at the end of May.

Namibia

Q195. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister what is her assessment of the prospects of a peaceful solution to the political problems of Namibia.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

We very much regret the early difficulties encountered in the implementation of the United Nations plan for Namibian independence and deplore the incursion which led to these. We welcome the agreement on the return of SWAPO forces to positions north of the 16th parallel in Angola. It is essential that this is put into effect and that henceforth all sides abide by their undertakings in the United Nations plan.

Eastlands

Q236. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Eastlands in Rugby.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has no plans at present to do so.

Elections (Publicity)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is the total amount of money being spent by Her Majesty's Government Departments on publicising the individual's right to vote in the forthcoming *(a)* county council and *(b)* European elections.

The Prime Minister: Every person registered to vote at these elections will receive a poll card specifying the election, and when and where polling will take place: the cost to the Treasury at the forthcoming European parliamentary elections is expected to be in excess of £3 million; a corresponding figure for the county council elections is not readily available. The cost of delivering candidates' election addresses at the European parliamentary elections, expected to be in excess of £4 million, will also be met by the Treasury. An annual campaign undertaken by the Home Office at a cost of around £0·5 million publicises the need to be included in the electoral register in order to secure the right to vote at all elections in the forthcoming year.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 April.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

This morning my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister addressed the conference on security and co-operation in Europe forum at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. This afternoon my right hon. Friend will attend the 150th anniversary of independence celebrations in Luxembourg.

EC (Monetary Union)

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library a copy of the Delors committee's report on economic and monetary union in the European Community.

The Prime Minister: I have done so today.

Football Violence

Mr. Denis Howell: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken to enforce the convention on spectator violence at sports events signed on 19 August 1985 by Ministers of 10 nations, including the United Kingdom; what specific results have been achieved in the implementation of each of the 17 articles of this convention, and if she has any plans to assure the European Union of Football Associations that the convention will be fully implemented so that English football clubs can be re-admitted to European football competitions.

The Prime Minister: Fifteen countries have signed and ratified the European convention which was initiated and drafted by the United Kingdom following the Heysel stadium tragedy in 1985. The United Kingdom was the first signatory to the convention and chairs the standing committee which monitors its operation. Considerable progress has been made by the Government, the police and the football authorities to give effect to the measures contained in the convention. The Football Spectators Bill will provide further measures to counter hooliganism at football matches in this country and abroad. We will continue to keep UEFA informed of progress on these matters.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Eggar: The most recent information available as regards women officers in the aid wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and in the equivalent diplomatic service grades is as follows:

Grade		*Number*		*Percentage*	
HCS	*DS*	*Aid Wing (at 1 April 1989)*	*Diplomatic Wing (at 31 December 1988)*	*Aid Wing (at 1 April 1989)*	*Diplomatic Wing (at 31 December 1988)*
				Per cent.	*Per cent.*
1-3	Senior grade	0	4	0	2·6
4	No DS equivalent	0	—	0	—
5	DS4	4	10	10	3·5
6	No DS equivalent	3	—	4·6	—
7	DS5	19	35	11	9·8
All grades	DS[1] mainstream	663	759	43·8	24·3

[1] Information concerning all Home Civil Service equivalent grades in the FCO at 31 December 1988 is not yet available.

There are no members of ethnic minority groups at DS5 and above in the diplomatic wing. The total number of staff in the diplomatic wing who have identified themselves as coming from ethnic minorities is 97, representing 1·8 per cent. of respondents.

In the aid wing, 1·7 per cent. of staff above grade 7 are from ethnic minorities. The total number of aid wing staff who have identified themselves as coming from ethnic minorities is 89, representing 5·9 per cent. of respondents.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: New recruits are asked to complete a form concerning their ethnic origins when they join the diplomatic or aid wings of the FCO.

An initial survey of the ethnic origins of existing staff was carried out in April 1986 with follow-up exercises in September 1986, and January-February 1988. There are no plans for a further survey of this kind.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Eggar: There is no direct recruitment into the top grades of the FCO—above DS8-7D, equivalent to AT/HEO/D in the home Civil Service.

Appointments in the aid wing are by internal promotion or by open competition, and an equal opportunities policy is applied.

The FCO is an equal opportunity employer. This policy is made clear in recruitment literature and advertising, including, on occasions, in the ethnic press.

Rain Forest

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his discussions with Senõr Londono, Foreign Minister of Colombia, during his visit to London on rain forest problems.

Mr. Eggar: During his visit to London from 10 to 13 April, I raised with Senõr Londono the strong concern felt in this country about the problems of the tropical rain forests. I stressed that we were willing to co-operate with South American Governments on this issue.

Namibia

Mr. Robert Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Nations peace plan of recent outbreaks of violence in Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: Recent events in Namibia have demonstrated that implementation of the United Nations plan for Namibian independence can be a success only if all parties abide by their undertakings in that plan. We have been active diplomatically in helping to put the United Nations plan back on track.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there are any immediate plans to deploy the 7,500 United Nations troops in Namibia as specified under United Nations Security Council resolution 435.

Mrs. Chalker: This is a matter for the United Nations Secretary General. We have made it clear that, as a permanent member of the Security Council, we would consider promptly and sympathetically any request by the United Nations Secretary General for reinforcing the United Nations transition assistance group. He has made no such request.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Nations troops were in Namibia on 1 April; how many were proposed to be there under the original United Nations plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The strength of UNTAG's military component on 1 April was over 750. The full strength of UNTAG's military component is 4,650 as recommended in the United Nations Secretary General's report of 23 January. This is a reduction from the original level of 7,500 set out in 1978. The rate of deployment of UNTAG was for the United Nations to decide, once authorisation had been given by the General Assembly. We regret that delays, not of our making, in the Security Council and the General Assembly gave the secretary general inadequate lead-in time.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East, *Official Report*, 10 April, column *359*, when he expects a decision on how the 10 million ecus earmarked by the European Community for the Namibia development trust are to be spent; and if he will make a further statement.

Mrs. Chalker: No decision has yet been taken on how the sum to which my hon. Friend refers is to be spent. It has not however been earmarked for the Namibia development trust. The Namibia development trust is simply one organisation which will be eligible to receive funds if it submits suitable projects. The European Commission is well aware of the need for assistance to Namibia to be strictly impartial during the transition to independence.

South Africa

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent action within the Council of Ministers Her Majesty's Government took in relation to a proposed joint EEC statement on the South African Disclosure of Foreign Funding Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have drawn attention within meetings of the Council of Ministers to the need for careful consideration of the Bill's implications for positive measures programmes in South Africa. A demarche on behalf of the Twelve was subsequently made by the Spanish ambassador in Cape Town. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said on 16 March, we have also made bilateral representations to the South African Government.

Diplomats

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many serious offences were allegedly committed in 1988 by persons entitled to diplomatic immunity; and how many foreign diplomats were withdrawn from their posts in Britain in that year as a result of alleged offences.

Mr. Eggar: Forty-four alleged serious offences by persons entitled to immunity were drawn to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1988. "Serious offences" are defined in accordance with the report to the Foreign Affairs Committee "The abuse of diplomatic immunities and privileges (1985)" as offences falling into a category which could in certain circumstances attract a penalty of six months or more; we are advised that very few of the alleged offences would have been likely to attract a custodial sentence. The majority involved drinking and driving and shoplifting.

Fourteen diplomats were withdrawn from their posts in Britain in 1988 following alleged offences.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the number of unpaid parking fines incurred by each diplomatic mission in London during 1988.

Mr. Eggar: The information is given in the table. The table also includes those international organisations which have incurred unpaid fines. The figures may be reduced by late payment.

The total for 1988 (10,079) indicates a 30 per cent. reduction over the total 1987 figure (14,437) and is only 9 per cent. of the 1984 figure (108,845) the last to be published before the introduction in May 1985 of the Government's policy on parking by members of diplomatic missions in May 1985.

We welcome the further reduction in unpaid parking fines that has been achieved during 1988 and appreciate the co-operation of diplomatic missions since the introduction of the parking policy. We shall continue to monitor carefully the level of unpaid fines, and bring pressure to bear on diplomatic missions to reduce this still further.

Unpaid parking fines

	1988	*1987*
Egypt	668	799
Soviet Union	656	622
Saudi Arabia	357	382
Poland	340	329
Cameroon	311	159
Spain	310	435
Cote d'Ivoire	300	138
Sudan	286	236
Brunei	281	127
Iraq	274	424
Greece	259	258
Malaysia	237	329
Pakistan	228	394
Qatar	228	413
Turkey	201	254
Israel	195	216
Thailand	188	246
Morocco	182	263
Korea	175	149
China	167	551
Tunisia	158	166
Sierra Leone	157	189
Zaire	141	150
Germany (Federal Republic)	123	130
United Arab Emirates	122	358
France	112	513
Japan	110	153
Portugal	109	170
Ghana	105	205
Venezuela	105	116
Brazil	120	149
Germany (Democratic Republic)	91	185
Algeria	88	172
Bulgaria	88	80
Yugoslavia	88	104
Jordan	87	165
Ethiopia	80	82
India	79	207
Bangladesh	77	71
Peru	75	155
Cyprus	72	96
Norway	72	60
Kuwait	70	186
Italy	69	302
Canada	66	130
Liberia	61	70
Finland	59	82
Senegal	58	43
Tanzania	58	48
Romania	54	59
Barbados	50	172
Sweden	50	58
Ecuador	49	24
Belgium	45	57
Zambia	45	60
Hungary	44	53
Nigeria	44	251
PDR Yemen	44	53
Fiji	43	40
Ireland	43	74
Cuba	41	26
Jamaica	41	68
Kenya	40	138
Indonesia	38	65
Uruguay	38	55
Burma	37	88
Angola	36	0
Somalia	36	41
Czechoslovakia	35	38
Lebanon	35	41
Zimbabwe	34	223
Iran	33	183
Mauritius	32	25
Uganda	32	41
Gabon	31	78
Paraguay	31	33
Nicaragua	29	10
Yemen Arab Republic	29	44
Gambia	28	27
Guyana	27	42
Oman	26	295
Philippines	26	45
Malawi	22	6
United States of America	22	77
Honduras	16	16
Iceland	16	51
Trinidad	16	31
Dominica	14	2
Panama	12	22
Lesotho	11	19
Togo	11	18
Colombia	10	23
Mexico	10	35
Afghanistan	9	8
Seychelles	9	10
Guatemala	8	0
Netherlands	8	6
Antigua and Barbuda	6	13
Austria	6	12
Chile	6	76
Vietnam	6	4
Bolivia	5	5
Botswana	5	29
Eastern Caribbean	5	8
Nepal	5	10
Sri Lanka	5	8
Mongolia	4	1
Luxembourg	3	2
Switzerland	3	0
Bahamas	2	7
Denmark	2	5
El Salvador	2	0

	1988	1987
Singapore	2	2
Papua New Guinea	1	3
Australia	0	0
Bahrain	0	6
Belize	0	0
Costa Rica	0	20
Grenada	0	0
Holy See	0	0
Malta	0	0
Mozambique	0	0
New Zealand	0	0
South Africa	0	19
Swaziland	0	5
Tonga	0	0
International Organisations		
Commonwealth Secretariat	21	75
Cocoa	13	7
WEU	10	15
IMO	1	13
EEC	1	0
UN	0	0
Coffee	0	0
Immarsat	0	0
Sugar	0	0
Totals	10,079	14,437

TRANSPORT

St. Pancras-Sheffield Line

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to discuss with the British Railways Board the further electrification of the St. Pancras-Sheffield midland line.

Mr. Portillo: I have no plans to do so. It is for BR to propose such a scheme if it believes it to be worthwhile.

Ryrie Rules

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had concerning the Ryrie rules for *(a)* road projects and *(b)* rail projects.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend and I have meetings from time to time with potential private sector operators about the interpretation of these rules.

Lindane Container (English Channel)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the individual amounts of expenditure laid out by his Department in the attempt to recover the lost container of lindane in the Channel.

Mr. Portillo: The container of lindane was on board MV Perintis which sank in international waters in the English Channel on 13 March.

As the result of an Anglo-French air-sea search the floating container of lindane was located in a French area of responsibility on 15 March and taken under tow towards Cherbourg by the French authorities. While in transit the container was lost again. The French have subsequently carried out a very extensive but unsuccessful search but have not sought—or required—British assistance.

The exact location of the container is still unknown but is thought to be about 15 km north-west of Cap de la Hague, in a sector of the Channel for which the French authorities are fully responsible for taking counter-pollution action. Accordingly the Department has not been involved in the search.

Only £302·24 has been expended by the Department in the search for the lindane, on an aerial surveillance flight by an MPCU aircraft on 15 March as part of the initial, successful, search for the floating container.

M1-M25 Junction

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average lengths of peak hour tailback on the M1 at its junction with the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We do not systematically record information about the lengths of tailbacks.

M1 (Traffic Flow)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 11 April to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, if he will identify the types of vehicles and numbers in the quoted traffic flow of 5,200 between junctions 9 and 10 on the M1.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Typical peak flows by vehicle types are:

	A.M. peak southbound Per cent.	*A.M. peak northbound Per cent.*
Motorcycles	0·5	0·8
Cars/taxis	71·0	77·4
LGV	8 0	9·3
HGV	20·0	11·5
Bus/coach	0·5	1·0
TOTAL	100·0	100·0

M1 (Accidents)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles were involved in accidents between junctions 9 and 10 on the M1 for each month since January 1985.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of vehicles involved in injury accidents between junctions 9 and 10 on the M1, by month, from 1985 to 1987, are shown in the table. Detailed figures for 1988 are not yet available.

Number of vehicles involved in accidents

1985	*Number of vehicles*
January	0
February	4
March	1
April	5
May	1
June	0
July	1
August	6
September	0
October	8
November	6
December	12
Total	44

Number of vehicles involved in accidents

1986	*Number of vehicles*
January	4
February	1
March	5
April	7
May	0
June	5
July	2
August	20
September	3
October	21
November	4
December	15
Total	87

Number of vehicles involved in accidents

1987	*Number of vehicles*
January	0
February	2
March	0
April	14
May	0
June	9
July	7
August	4
September	12
October	24
November	5
December	5
Total	82

Container Terminal (Hull)

137. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the present situation with regard to the closed container terminal in Hull.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that this terminal in the port of Hull ran at a loss for many years. After trying without success to secure the registered dock workers' agreement to reduced manning levels in order to make the terminal competitive, Associated British Ports announced its temporary closure last August. This January ABP announced that the closure would be permanent. The future of the terminal site is a commercial decision for ABP.

Roads

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he intends to publish proposals on the future road network in the north-east region;

(2) when he expects to announce changes in the roads programme;

(3) when he expects to publish a White Paper on the future of the road system.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are currently reviewing the trunk road programme, including routes in the north-east region. We expect to announce the results in the early summer.

Traffic Area Organisation

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to carry out a review of the traffic area organisation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have commissioned a review of the functions of the traffic commissioners and of the traffic area offices to identify any changes which would improve efficiency or standards of performance. The review will be carried out by Mr. J. Palmer, CB, who was a deputy secretary in the Department until his retirement. Any views or representations can be sent to Mr. Palmer at the Department's headquarters at 2 Marsham street.

"Motorcycling Safety"

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has reached in the light of comments received on his paper "Motorcycling Safety", issued in February 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The proposals for change were warmly received. There was a general recognition that the urgent need was to make motorcycling safer. The proposal that prospective moped riders and motorcyclists should be trained before being allowed to ride on their own received particularly widespread support.

The aspects of the proposals which led to most comment, were those dealing with progression to more powerful machines (over 400cc), and the duration of provisional motorcycle licences, which we propose reducing to one year. On the former, many commentators advocated a power limit either as well as, or instead of, the 400cc limit. On the latter, there was widespread concern that one year was not long enough, although the need for a firm incentive for provisional licence holders to take training within a year at most was widely recognised. Comments were also received on the proposed changes to the car licence holders, moped and motorcycle entitlements, and on the proposed prohibition on learners carrying passengers on the road.

In the light of these comments we have reached the following conclusions:

1. Car drivers' full moped entitlement will in future be provisional. This will make the position regarding moped the same as that for motorcycles. Car drivers' provisional motorcycling entitlement will be retained.

2. Car drivers will have to undergo the same training as other prospective motorcycle and moped riders before their provisional licence entitlement comes into effect.

3. The compulsory training, to be known as "basic training", will not necessarily have to be completed on one day. In the light of representations, there will be waivers of the basic training requirement for certain offshore islands, but these will be subject to tight conditions. We are to start mandatory training in mid-1990. In the meantime, training schemes will be phased in on a voluntary basis wherever possible. Detailed discussions are now well advanced with training bodies, local authorities, motorcycle manufacturers and dealers about the content of the training courses and the arrangement for ensuring that motorcyclists can take the training with the minimum practical difficulties.

The proposal to reduce the validity of provisional licences from two years to one will be modified. A licence will be valid for one year in the first instance and will be extended for a further year if the holder has taken but failed a test before the end of the year or has booked a test which, for good reason, could not be taken.

4. The proposal to create a licence category for motorcycles in excess of 400 cc will be amended to incorporate a power limit. We favour a system under which drivers will be

able to progress to larger machines after two years' riding experience on a full licence. The technical definition of the power limit, and the scope of the two years' experience qualification, will be considered further in the light of consultations on the European Commission's proposal for a second directive on driver licensing which covers both points. We are still considering whether an additional test could be provided for those exceptional cases where a rider might have gained sufficient experience to ride a bigger machine in less than two years.

5. As proposed in the original package, learner riders will be banned from carrying passengers. Concern expressed in the consultation exercise about the degree to which carrying pillion passengers changes the handling characteristics of motorcycles (particularly smaller ones) far outweighed comments favouring continuation of the present arrangements.

BREL (Sale)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the sale of British Rail Engineering Ltd. is to be completed.

Mr. Portillo: I am pleased to announce that the railways board has today completed the sale of its engineering subsidiary BREL (1988) Ltd. to the consortium comprising the management and employees of BREL, Trafalgar house plc and Asea Brown Boveri Ltd.

Traffic Noise

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the noise levels on the db(A) scale at which compensation or soundproofing grants may be payable for the United Kingdom and the other members of the European Economic Community in respect of new roads or railway lines.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* For England and Wales road traffic noise is covered by the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975. Broadly comparable regulations apply to Scotland. There are no such regulations applying to Northern Ireland. We do not have (for either road or rail) detailed information of arrangements in the other EC countries.

The 1975 regulations apply a threshold level of 68db(A)L10 18 hour. Where it is estimated that noise levels from traffic will within 15 years be at or in excess of this level at dwellings within 300 m of the new road, a duty is imposed on highway authorities to offer secondary glazing provided that:

(a) the traffic noise level will be at least 1 db(A) more than the level before the road was built; and

(b) noise from traffic using the new road will contribute at least 1 db(A) to the calculated level.

There is no statutory noise standard for new railways. For further information on rail noise insulation, I refer to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 10 April at column *409*.

Ferries

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by name, for each of the seven passenger ferries which do not comply with the enhanced safety standards recommended after the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise, the reason why modification is not a realistic proposition *(a)* because it is technically impossible to make the modification, *(b)* because financial consideration prevents work being carried out, or *(c)* due to any other specified reason; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) on 4 April 1989, at column *20*, which named the ferries that the owners have indicated will not be retained for more than about another three years. Modification would be so extensive that they do not believe it to be economically realistic.

WALES

Beef

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the present state of the beef sector of the agricultural industry in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: The beef sector in Wales is in a healthy condition. The June 1988 agricultural census results show that the total beef herd in Wales increased by 2 per cent. over the previous year while the number of heifers in calf intended mainly for rearing calves for beef rose by 24 per cent., reflecting producers' optimism for the beef market.

Water Charges (Fire Service)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that the fire service will be exempt from charges for water when Welsh Water is privatised.

Mr. Grist: Clause 79(1) of the Water Bill currently before Parliament specifically precludes the privatised companies from making charges in respect of water taken for the purposes of extinguishing fires, testing apparatus installed or equipment used for extinguishing fires.

DEFENCE

Disarmament

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the achievements made by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in multilateral disarmament of *(a)* conventional weapons, *(b)* chemical and biological weapons and *(c)* nuclear weapons since 1959.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

With regard to conventional weapons, all NATO states are signatories of the agreement reached in Stockholm in September 1986 on a range of confidence-building measures designed to increase openness and predictability about military activities in Europe NATO states are currently participating in a further round of such talks in Vienna designed to build on the results achieved in Stockholm. Also in Vienna, NATO/Warsaw pact negotiations have just begun on conventional armed forces in Europe with the aim of establishing a stable balance of forces in Europe: the mandate for these negotiations is based largely on Alliance proposals. These new talks supersede the MBFR negotiations, in which a number of Alliance countries participated: these concluded on 2 February.

In the field of biological and chemical weapons an international convention prohibiting the development, production and stockpiling of biological weapons was concluded in 1972. All NATO member states are a party to it. The multilateral negotiations for a global ban on chemical weapons continue at the 40-nation conference on disarmament in Geneva.

In respect of nuclear weapons NATO countries actively supported the successful negotiation of the INF treaty removing ground based intermediate range nuclear missiles from Europe: the elimination of these missiles was first proposed by NATO in 1981.

Soldiers (Arrests)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have been arrested by the military police in *(a)* Salisbury and *(b)* Amesbury and subsequently charged with being drunk and disorderly or causing a breach of the peace in each of the past 12 months.

Mr. Neubert: The Royal Military police made no arrests for alcohol-related offences in Salisbury during the last 12 months. In Amesbury however, they arrested one soldier in July 1988, two in August 1988 and one in March 1989 for such offences.

DROPS

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds he has made payments to Leyland Daf, in connection with DROPS, additional to contract; when these payments were made; if he plans to make further such payments; in what form, and in favour of which company, these payments were made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Following experience from the validation trials, the Ministry of Defence decided to combine features from the evaluation truck and the validation truck in finalising the production build standard for the medium mobility vehicles. Appropriate amendments were therefore made to the contract and payments were authorised to Leyland Daf reflecting these amendments. These payments were contained within the original approved programme limits. No further such amendments for DROPS equipments are envisaged.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from Leyland Daf on errors in the DROPS requirements as originally framed by EASAMS; what assessment he has made of the implications for defence procurement of these errors; to what extent companies competed against standards outwith the formal requirements; if he plans to seek to recover from EASAMS sums paid to Leyland Daf for rectification of the problems caused by these errors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: There have been no such representations from Leyland Daf. Companies competed against target figures laid down by the Ministry of Defence, not EASAMS Ltd. who were employed in the role of management support only. The statement of requirement made clear to the competing companies that these targets would be difficult to meet in combination and that trade-offs between parameters would be allowed.

Swimming Pool (Mount Troodos)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received calling for the construction of a swimming pool at RAF Mount Troodos in Cyprus; and whether he intends to install such a facility.

Mr. Neubert: No bid has been received for a swimming pool at RAF Troodos. Moreover, the current scales for the funding of swimming pools at public expense provide only for their installation and maintenance if the pool meets a service training requirement; there is none in this case.

Tornado

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received about training of aircrew on Tornado aircraft.

Mr. Neubert: None.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last reviewed the operational capacities of the Tornado; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The operational capabilities of the RAF's front-line aircraft are kept under constant review. The build-up of the Tornado F3 force is proceeding satisfactorily, and the fourth squadron is due to become operational this year. As for the Tornado GR1, my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, informed the House during the Royal Air Force debate on 9 March at columns 1055-56 that we have decided to proceed with a mid-life improvement programme (columns 1055-56). A contract for the development phase of the programme was placed on Panavia on 16 March.

RAF Leeming (Security)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last reviewed the security of RAF Leeming in Yorkshire.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A comprehensive security inspection by command staffs took place in February 1989 and interim inspections are conducted by the station security staff.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to erect a perimeter fence at RAF Leeming.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is already a boundary fence which delineates the extent of MOD property. Where it has been considered necessary to provide enhanced physical security, additional fencing has been erected.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many unauthorised intrusions have occurred at RAF Leeming in the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There were no reports of any unauthorised intrusions.

RAF Upper Heyford

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about proposed United States military construction at RAF Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire;

(2) when his Department was first notified of the decision of the United States Air force to apply for funding for (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop at RAF Upper Heyford, in fiscal year 1990;

(3) on what date representations were first received from his United States counterpart regarding proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop;

(4) when he was first aware that the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop had been added to the United States military construction budget request for fiscal year 1990;

(5) on what date or dates design work started on the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop;

(6) which company or companies have been awarded conracts for design work on the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop;

(7) on what date or dates the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop is scheduled to be started;

(8) which construction contracts for the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop have been awarded; and to which company or companies;

(9) on what date or dates the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop is scheduled to be completed; and when these facilities are scheduled to be operational;

(10) whether it is normal practice for the United States Air Force to start design work for proposed construction in the United Kingdom before approval for such construction has been given by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The budget for the United States military construction programme submitted to Congress at the end of January 1989 for the fiscal years 1990-91 included proposals for additions to the flight simulator facility, the avionics maintenance shop and the jet engine shop at RAF Upper Heyford. The hon. Member was informed of these budgetary proposals in the reply that I gave him on 6 February at columns *515-16*.

Congress has not yet approved these proposals, nor has the United Kingdom Government authorised work to proceed. Consequently, no contracts have been let for these projects. However, in accordance with normal United States forward planning procedures, some preliminary design work was commissioned from the PSA in August 1988 and the Ministry of Defence was informed of the proposals in parallel.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will describe the role and function of the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop;

(2) what variants of the F-111 aircraft will be supported by the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop;

(3) how many aircraft will be supported by the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop;

(4) if he will describe the new mission that will be supported by the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government have not agreed to any changes to the role or aircraft of the USAF 20th Tactical Fighter Wing stationed at RAF Upper Heyford, nor have they authorised any proposals to alter or expand the facilities at the station, other than for the aircraft currently based there.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop was not included in the answer to the hon. Member for Leyton, *Official Report*, 9 June 1988, columns *660-62* regarding United States military construction in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These proposals were not submitted to Congress until January 1989.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries have been informed of the proposed construction at RAF Upper Heyford of (i) additions to the flight simulator facility, (ii) additions to the avionics maintenance shop and (iii) additions to the jet engine shop.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has regarding United States military construction at RAF Upper Heyford for the next five fiscal years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 6 February 1989 at columns *515-16*.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has regarding the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation funded military construction at RAF Upper Heyford for the next five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO infrastructure funding for 1990 onwards has not yet been approved.

Dual-Capable Aircraft

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on granting approval to

the United States Air Force for construction of new facilities to support the basing of new dual-capable aircraft in advance of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation decisions on nuclear modernisation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No construction required to support new dual-capable aircraft will be authorised in advance of NATO decisions; no early decisions are expected.

United States Air Force

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on whether it is normal practice for the United States Air Force to request funding for proposed construction in the United Kingdom before approval for such construction has been given by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am informed that it is not unusual for the United States Administration to request budgetary authority in advance of construction approval because of the long lead times in the United States programming and budgeting process.

Low Flying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what special circumstances in the last five years Royal Air Force aircrew have been authorised to fly at a height less than that set out in joint service publication 318 and the United Kingdom military low flying handbook, as provided in section 51(b) of the Air Force Act 1955.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 9 February 1989]:* The military flying regulations (JSP 318) set out special circumstances under which flight at a height less than that provided for in those regulations is allowed.

Joint Warfare Wing

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates, at what cost to his Department, and on what topics guest speakers have been invited to the joint warfare wing or its successor establishment since 1978.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* I have taken the hon. Member's question to relate to non-Government guest speakers, but including those who have retired from Government service or the armed forces. Records of visits by such speakers to the joint warfare wing 1978-1982 are no longer available. Full records for the period 1982 onwards are not available but topics on which guest speakers can be identified as having lectured include aspects of the Soviet threat; campaigns since world war 2; current international affairs; arms control negotiations; counter-terrorism; the conventional balance in Europe; the strategic defence initiative; the role of conventional land/air forces; and aspects of modern media and publicity techniques. Speakers are offered a fee in the region of £50 to £80, together with travel expenses.

SCOTLAND

Wildlife and Countryside Act

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the annual payments by district council area made in respect of compensation agreements approved under section 30 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in 1988 and each of the preceding four years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Nature Conservancy Council (Scotland) has advised me that it has received no claims for compensation under section 30 of the 1981 Act in the period 1984-88. Had claims been made I would be unable to divulge details for reasons of confidentiality.

Federation Internationale des Vins et Spiritueux

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what approach he has received about the hosting of a reception for the Federation Internationale des Vins et Spiritueux during its forthcoming assembly in Scotland organised by the Scotch Whisky Association; and what has been his response.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has not received any such approach.

Torness Power Station

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost and value of third party insurance for the consequences of any nuclear accident at Torness power station; and if he will make a statement on the proportion of the risk which is carried by the Government, the South of Scotland Electricity Board and insurance companies, respectively.

Mr. Lang: The Nuclear Installations Act 1965 requires all operators of nuclear sites to make provision, either by insurance or other means, to meet claims for compensation in respect of injury or damage arising from a nuclear accident. The level required under the Act is currently £20 million. The cost to the South of Scotland Electricity Board of providing this cover is a matter for the board. Any claims in excess of the operator's liability and up to a sterling equivalent of 300 million special drawing rights (about £230 million) would be met from public funds. Beyond that, the Act provides that claims shall be satisfied to such extent and out of funds provided by such means as Parliament may determine.

Adult Education

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will set out Her Majesty's Government's policy on adult education in Scotland;

(2) what plans he has to issue guidelines to local authorities regarding provision of adult education in Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what proposals he has to promote adult education in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Education authorities in Scotland have a duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to ensure that there is available in their areas adequate and efficient provision of further education, and this includes voluntary part-time and full-time courses of instruction for persons over school age and social, cultural and recreative activities. Adult education is one element of this provision. Education authorities decide for themselves the level of provision in the light of local needs and

circumstances, and having regard to the activities of other institutions providing further education or promoting its development.

The Government monitor developments in further education and, using resources available centrally, encourage particular areas of activity and provide support to a range of bodies and voluntary organisations whose functions include the promotion, development and provision of further education. But the education authorities determine their own adult education programmes and respond to needs as they arise in their localities. The Government have no plans to issue guidelines to authorities.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to earmark central Government educational expenditure grant for the provision of adult education in local education authorities in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: General support for local authority services is provided through revenue support grant which affords local authorities maximum discretion to choose their own spending priorities. The excellent revenue support grant settlement for 1989-90 should afford authorities plenty of scope to provide such adult education services as they deem appropriate.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* figures for the past five years showing what financial resources were devoted to adult education in Scotland broken down by education authority area on a per capita basis;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* total expenditure on adult education in Scotland shown at constant 1979 prices for 1979 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Expenditure on adult education is one element of expenditure on further, higher and community education and cannot be identified separately.

REPLAN Scheme

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce a similar scheme in Scotland to the REPLAN scheme in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. Education authorities have a responsibility to ensure that adequate and efficient further education is available in their areas. The flexibility of the modular system of further education applying in Scotland and the Scottish wider access programme have both increased the opportunities available for all adults—including those not currently in employment—to benefit from education and updating. Education provision for the unemployed is also available through voluntary organisations supported by Scottish Education Department funding, and through the Training Agency's employment training programme.

Adult Counselling

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has plans to expand and develop adult counselling in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 gives education authorities powers to provide vocational guidance services for persons other than those attending or leaving schools and colleges. Advice was given to education authorities in "The Careers Service—Memorandum of Guidance to Education Authorities in Scotland" issued in March 1988. Guidance and counselling for adult students is an important element of the provision being made by education authorities under the Scottish wider access programme.

Open Learning Centres

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has plans to expand and develop open learning centres in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office is providing funds towards the establishment and development of an open learning centre in Whitfield, Dundee. I hope that this initiative will provide valuable experience in delivering adult basic education, which may lead to the establishment of further centres in Scotland.

Human Rights

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights in Scotland; and which organisations made these representations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available. My right hon. and learned Friend receives a large number of representations from individuals and organisations covering a wide range of subjects. While a number of these could no doubt be regarded as alleging breaches or denials of human rights, such representations are not separately identified and details of their origin and number cannot therefore be provided.

Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will instigate research into the suitability of the drug L.Threonine for the treatment of motor neurone disease;

(2) what proportion of his budget is spent on research into motor neurone disease.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Home and Health Department is not funding any research relating to the drug L.Threonine or motor neurone disease, but sympathetic consideration would be given to applications for any soundly based research project. The Medical Research Council funds research into aspects of motor neurone disease and is presently supporting two projects based in Edinburgh and two in Glasgow.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Rifkind: The number and percentage of women officers in grades 1 to 7 and overall in the Scottish Office and associated departments are shown in the table:

	Women	Women per cent.
Grade 1	—	—
Grade 2	—	—
Grade 3	1	4·0
Grade 4	—	—
Grade 5	8	6·8
Grade 6	25	14·3
Grade 7	42	10·7
Overall	3,185	41·8

None of the staff in unified grades 1 to 7 describe themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority. Of the total staff 0·4 per cent. are from the ethnic minority groups.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department conducted a voluntary survey of the ethnic origins of staff in 1987. Since then all new entrants have been asked to complete a questionnaire in order to keep this information up-to-date. I have no plans to conduct a further survey.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department does not conduct recruitment for top grades.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mrs. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current pupil-teacher ratios for each of the Scottish education authorities in both primary and secondary education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The provisional average pupil-teacher ratios in education authority schools at September 1988 are set out in the table.

	Primary	Secondary
Borders	17·9	12·3
Central	20·2	13·3
Dumfries/Galloway	18·7	11·6
Fife	19·9	13·1
Grampian	19·2	13·1
Highland	18·1	12·2
Lothian	20·0	12·7
Strathclyde	21·3	12·8
Tayside	19·7	11·6
Orkney	16·1	10·2
Shetland	13·6	9·5
Western Isles	15·0	10·0
ALL SCOTLAND	20·2	12·6

Storm Damage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the amount of timber lost through wind blow during the storm that struck Scotland on 13 February; what measures he has taken to compensate the owners of such timber; and what has been the total cost of such measures.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: An estimated 300,000 cu m of timber were blown down in Scotland on 13 February. As regards compensation, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

YTS

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many YTS schemes are run by voluntary and community organisations in each Scottish region;

(2) how many YTS schemes are run by the local authorities for each Scottish region;

(3) what is the total number of YTS schemes run in each local authority region in Scotland;

(4) how many YTS schemes are run by voluntary and community organisations which received a transitional funding grant before 1 April for each Scottish region;

(5) how many YTS schemes are run by local authorities which received a transitional funding grant before 1 April for each Scottish region;

(6) how many YTS schemes were paid a transitional funded grant in respect of training before 1 April for each Scottish region.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Details requested are set out in the table:

Number of schemes

	Schemes run by local authorities	Schemes run by community and voluntary organisations	Total YTS schemes	Schemes on transitional funding grant before 1 April 1989		
				Schemes run by local authorities	Schemes run by community and voluntary organisations	Total YTS schemes on transitional funding
Borders	4	—	7	2	—	2
Central	13	—	90	7	—	8
Dumfries and Galloway	7	—	51	6	—	7
Fife	12	2	90	5	—	8
Grampian	7	1	36	2	1	3
Highland	20	2	43	6	—	7
Lothian	29	8	179	12	8	20
Orkney	3	—	2	—	—	—
Shetland	2	—	4	1	—	1
Strathclyde	94	8	605	56	2	67
Tayside	7	5	31	3	5	8
Western Isles	2	—	2	—	—	—
Scotland	200	26	1,140	100	16	131

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many YTS schemes trainees are on schemes run by local authorities in each Scottish region;

(2) what is the total number of YTS scheme trainees in each local authority region in Scotland;

(3) how many trainees are on transitional funded YTS schemes run by local authorities for each Scottish region before 1 April;

(4) how many YTS trainees are on schemes run by voluntary and community organisations in each Scottish region;

(5) how many trainees were on YTS transitional funded schemes run by voluntary and community organisations in each Scottish region before 1 April;

(6) how many trainees were on YTS transitional funded grant schemes in each region in Scotland before 1 April.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Details requested are set out in the table:

Number of trainees on schemes

				Schemes on transitional funding grant before 1 April 1989		
	Schemes run by local authorities	*Schemes run by community and voluntary organisations*	*Total YTS schemes*	*Schemes run by local authorities*	*Schemes run by community and voluntary organisations*	*Total YTS schemes on transitional funding*
Borders	168	—	231	129	—	129
Central	921	—	3,384	357	—	387
Dumfries and Galloway	642	—	1,383	142	—	212
Fife	1,262	200	3,666	432	—	496
Grampian	948	59	3,908	99	59	158
Highland	633	89	2,065	302	—	340
Lothian	1,608	341	5,254	588	341	929
Orkney	150	—	150	—	—	—
Shetland	106	—	114	99	—	99
Strathclyde	5,764	807	25,185	3,505	306	4,372
Tayside	1,320	503	3,868	100	276	376
Western Isles	217	—	217	—	—	—
Scotland	13,739	1,999	49,425	5,753	982	7,498

HEALTH

Westminster and Chelsea Teaching Hospital

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when it is planned that demolition work will begin on the site of St. Stephen's hospital, Fulham, in preparation for the construction of the new Westminster and Chelsea teaching hospital.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from North West Thames regional health authority that contractors will be starting work on the St. Stephen's hospital site on 15 May 1989.

Constituency Sizes

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 25 largest constituencies in England, in terms of numbers of electors on the register as at the current date.

Mr. Freeman: The 1989 electoral statistics for local authority areas will be published in "OPCS Monitor EL89/1" on 25 April. Electoral statistics for parliamentary and European constituencies are still being prepared. They will be published in "Electoral Statistics, 1989" (Series EL No. 16) at the end of May, and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has received the second report of the committee for monitoring agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The committee for monitoring agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship has submitted its second report and copies have been placed in the Library. I am grateful to the committee and its chairman, Sir Peter Lazarus, for their excellent work in continuing to monitor the arrangements and for their second report. The report shows that, in general, the system of voluntary agreements, which govern tobacco advertising, health warnings and sports sponsorship, are continuing to work well and that the tobacco companies are honouring their commitments. This view is supported by the fact that the level of complaints to the committee has dropped substantially since its first report was published last year.

The chairman has expressed the hope that the Government and the tobacco industry will soon embark on renegotiating the voluntary agreements. We note his concern, and intend to discuss the way forward with the industry shortly. We also note and share his concern about older permanent advertisements which do not carry health warnings.

Bottled Water

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost in 1987 and 1988 of bottled water supplied to families with young babies by the East Anglian regional health authority and the Norwich district health authority.

Mr. Freeman: The health authorities did not supply bottled water to families with young babies.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of National Health Service funding, by region, is dedicated to services for *(a)* premature senile dementia, *(b)* youth mental illness services and *(c)* forensic services;

(2) if he will list the estimated cost by region of maintaining hospitals for the mentally ill, mentally handicapped and elderly.

Mr. Freeman: Information on health authorities' expenditure specifically on premature senile dementia, youth mental illness services and forensic services is not collected centrally.

For information on regions' total revenue expenditure on hospital services analysed to types of hospital (including "Geriatric", "Mental Illness" and "Mental Handicap") I refer the hon. Member to tables in the Department's annual publication "Health Services Costing Returns" (the latest being for 1986-87), copies of which are held in the Library.

NHS (Resources)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what criteria were employed to determine the allocation of the additional resources made available to the National Health Service as set out in the 1988 Autumn Statement *(a)* to regional health authorities and *(b)* from regional health authorities to district health authorities.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply of 21 December 1988 to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) at columns *316-18*.

Elderly People

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by region the estimated growth in the population of *(a)* over 75-year-old and *(b)* over 85-year-old people as a percentage of the total population for each of the next 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table.

Percentage of elderly population — *1985-Based Population Projections for Standard Regions* — *England and Wales*

Regions	*Age*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
North	Over 75	6·62	6·71	6·73	6·68	6·65	6·91	7·15	7·34	7·46	7·57	7·67
	Over 85	1·31	1·37	1·42	1·49	1·55	1·60	1·65	1·70	1.75	1·80	1·84
Yorkshire and Humberside	Over 75	6·91	6·95	6·92	6·83	6·76	6·97	7·14	7·26	7·32	7·37	7·41
	Over 85	1·44	1·50	1·55	1·61	1·67	1·72	1·76	1·80	1·84	1·88	1·92
East Midlands	Over 75	6·63	6·69	6·68	6·60	6·54	6·76	6·94	7·07	7·14	7·21	7·26
	Over 85	1·37	1·43	1·48	1·54	1·60	1·64	1·69	1·74	1·78	1·82	1·86
East Anglia	Over 75	7·61	7·66	7·65	7·57	7·51	7·77	7·94	8·06	8·13	8·19	8·23
	Over 85	1·63	1·70	1·77	1·85	1·92	1·99	2·04	2·10	2·16	2·22	2·27
South East	Over 75	7·08	7·09	7·05	6·94	6·85	7·03	7·16	7·25	7·29	7·32	7·33
	Over 85	1·59	1·64	1·69	1·75	1·81	1·85	1·89	1·93	1·96	2·00	2·03
Greater London	Over 75	6·91	6·87	6·78	6·62	6·49	6·60	6·66	6·69	6·67	6·64	6·59
	Over 85	1·56	1·61	1·66	1·71	1·75	1·79	1·82	1·84	1·86	1·88	1·90
Remainder of South East	Over 75	7·19	7·23	7·22	7·13	7·07	7·29	7·47	7·60	7·67	7·73	7·78
	Over 85	1·60	1·66	1·71	1·78	1·84	1·89	1·94	1·98	2·03	2·08	2·12
South West	Over 75	8·60	8·63	8·60	8·48	8·40	8·64	8·79	8·89	8·93	8·97	8·99
	Over 85	1·95	2·02	2·09	2·18	2·25	2·32	2·38	2·44	2·49	2·55	2·60
West Midlands	Over 75	6·22	6·30	6·32	6·26	6·22	6·45	6·66	6·81	6·91	6·99	7·05
	Over 85	1·21	1·27	1·32	1·38	1·44	1·48	1·53	1·57	1·62	1·66	1·69
North West	Over 75	6·77	6·80	6·77	6·67	6·59	6·78	6·94	7·04	7·09	7·13	7·16
	Over 85	1·38	1·44	1·49	1·55	1·60	1·65	1·69	1·73	1·76	1·80	1·83
Wales	Over 75	7·24	7·30	7·33	7·30	7·30	7·54	7·73	7·87	7·97	8·07	8·17
	Over 85	1·53	1·59	1·65	1·71	1·77	1·83	1·87	1·92	1·97	2·02	2·06

Mental Illness

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for each district health authority, the total number of people *(a)* receiving mental illness services for up to six months, *(b)* receiving mental illness services for six months to one year and *(c)* receiving mental illness services for over one year.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested on duration of receipt of mental illness services in residential accommodation or on a non-residential basis is not held centrally.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has given to regional health authorities on the funding of resettlement projects for the mentally ill.

Mr. Freeman: Resources for care in the community are made available from the main programme expenditure of health authorities and local authorities. Although no guidance has been given centrally, is is for health authorities and local authorities to determine how to deploy these resources in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Within health authority budgets, a specific allocation of joint finance is identified for community schemes jointly agreed between health authorities, local authorities, family practitioner committees and voluntary organisations.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has issued any guidelines to regions for achieving targeted growth in mental illness services.

Mr. Freeman: Last summer we issued planned guidelines to health authorities which included a requirement that by 1991 each district must have developed a "care programme" to provide a system of co-ordinated continuing care for people chronically disabled by mental illness, but living mainly in the community.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has issued any guidelines to health authorities on the way in which they determine the proportion of resources they should devote to services for the mentally ill.

Mr. Freeman: In general, allocations to regional health authorities do not make separate provision for individual clinical services or client groups. It is for authorities to determine how the resources available to them should be spent in line with national policy guidelines and their assessment of local needs and priorities.

Maternal Deaths (Anaesthesia)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women of non-Caucasian origin were among the 19 maternal deaths and one late maternal death in England and Wales in 1982, 1983 and 1984 associated with anaesthesia.

Mr. Freeman: Four.

Salmonella

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the source of *(a)* his statement on 5 December that 1,000 people had been affected by outbreaks of salmonella traced back to eggs and *(b)* his Department's statement on 6 December that 7,000 cases of salmonella had been so traced.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 17 February 1989]:* My statement on 5 December 1988 at column 19 that

"up to the end of October there had been 46 reported outbreaks of salmonella food poisoning in England and Wales involving about 1,000 cases"

related to cases where the infection was directly attributable to the consumption of eggs. Over the same 10-month period there had been a total of 23,039 salmonella isolations of which 10,544 were salmonella enteritidis phage type 4, the type predominantly associated with chicken and eggs.

My Department has never made any statement on 6 December or at any other time about 7,000 cases being traced.

Health Authorities (Allocations)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the cash allocations to regional health authorities in 1988-89 and 1989-90 in standard prices using 1989-90 as the base; and if he will estimate the cash allocations to regions on a weighted capitation basis for 1990-91 and 1991-92 using 1989-90 as the price base, assuming the total flow of resources as per the public expenditure White Paper, assuming population forecasts as per the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, and before taking account of inter-regional direct payments;

(2) what are the actual allocations made to regional health authorities for 1988-89 and for 1989-90 both on a current and standard price basis; and, in the case of the 1989-90 cash allocations, what are their percentage distances from the 1988-89 resource allocation working party target adjusted *(a)* by inflation and *(b)* by the percentage change between 1988-89 and 1989-90 in total nominal cash resources between 1989-90.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 16 March 1989]:* Initial allocations to regional health authorities in 1988-89 and 1989-90 at the price bases requested are shown in the following tables, together with 1989-90 allocation distances from 1988-89 RAWP targets adjusted as requested. The level of resources which will be allocated to direct payments between regions will be discussed with regional health authorities, and, until this process is complete, it is not possible to speculate about the distribution of funding in future years.

Table A

£ million

	Main service provision 1988-89		*1989-90 main service provision*
	Initial cash levels[1]	*Column 1 adjusted to 1989-90 cash levels*	*Initial cash levels*[1]
	Column 1	*Column 2*	*Column 3*
Northern	735	793	832
Yorkshire	830	894	937
Trent	1,010	1,089	1,147
East Anglian	438	472	497
North West Thames	808	871	913
North East Thames	1,007	1,086	1,137
South East Thames	898	968	1,018
South West Thames	746	804	844
Wessex	615	662	699
Oxford	482	520	558
South Western	732	789	832
West Midlands	1,186	1,278	1,340
Mersey	586	631	664
North Western	1,005	1,083	1,140

[1] Initial cash limit main provision. Excludes earmarked sums, for example, supra-regional services, AIDS, breast cancer screening and additional funding for the review body pay awards.

Table B

	1989-90 main service provision[1] *£ million Column 1*	*[2]Distance from 1988-89 targets adjusted by: Inflation 1988-89 to 1989-90*[3] *Per cent. Column 2*	*Actual increase in cash resources between 1988-89 and 1989-90 Per cent. Column 3*
Northern	832	+6·1	−1·58
Yorkshire	937	+6·1	−1·41
Trent	1,147	+5·2	−2·78
East Anglian	497	+3·9	−4·15
North West Thames	913	+12·4	4·27
North East Thames	1,137	+15·4	6·79
South East Thames	1,018	+9·9	1·66
South West Thames	844	+8·8	0·96
Wessex	699	+6·4	−1·82
Oxford	558	+7·2	−2·64
South Western	832	+6·9	−1·41
West Midlands	1,340	+6·2	−1·34
Mersey	664	+9·6	1·45
North Western	1,140	+6·6	−1·36

[1] As column 3 of Table A.
[2] Targets calculated from total resources available in 1988-89.
[3] As measured by the Gross Domestic Product Deflator.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farmers

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of farmers derive a significant proportion of their income from non-agricultural activities; and what proportion of national agricultural output is produced by those farmers.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Sea Disposal Licences

Ms. Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those operations for which sea disposal licences for the deposit or incineration of waste at sea have been granted under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The number of licences issued under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 for disposals in England and Wales is as follows:

	1986	*1987*	*1988*
Marine incineration	20	13	15
Liquid industrial waste	26	20	18
Solid industrial waste	3	8	11
Sewage sludge	17	17	15
Dredged spoil	100	101	138

All licences are now issued on an annual basis; until 1988 some solid industrial waste disposals were covered by five-year licences. With the exception of the dredged spoil category virtually all licences issued were renewals of existing licences.

Details of licences issued are maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on a public register.

Storm Damage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the amount of timber lost in the storm which struck England during October 1987; and what is the total cost of the measures taken as a result of the storm.

Mr. Donald Thompson: It is estimated that some 4 million cu. m of timber were blown down in England in the October 1987 storm. The Forestry Commission is expecting to pay in the region of £3 million in supplementary grants for the restocking of woodlands damaged in the storm.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice or recommendations he has received from the working party on pesticide residues on the enforcement of existing, or introduction of new, pesticide regulations, or other legislation, as a means of helping to reduce the use of pesticides against wildlife.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The working party on pesticide residues' remit is to collect and report data on pesticide residues: it does not make recommendations concerning the use or misuse of pesticides, since that is the task of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. I believe that it is for the enforcement authorities to control the misuse of pesticides against wildlife, taking advantage of the improved opportunity for prosecuting those responsible which results from the introduction of the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply of 23 March, *Official Report*, column *726-27*, what advice and recommendations he has received from the advisory committee on pesticides on the enforcement of existing, or the introduction of new, pesticide regulations, or other legislation, as a means of helping to reduce the use of pesticides against wildlife.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The advisory committee on pesticides has taken the view that enforcement of the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 is a matter for the competent enforcement agencies. The level of misuse of pesticides against wildlife has not suggested the need for additional measures or legislation.

Alar

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hectares of orchards were sprayed with Alar in 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Under the regular cycle of surveys, data have been collected for 1987 but not for 1988. The 1987 data are now being collated and will be published as soon as possible.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the crops on which the chemical Alar is used and the purposes for its use.

Mr. Donald Thompson: From the information available Alar products are currently used as growth regulators on apples, pears, chrysanthemums and other ornamentals, seed potatoes and on field beans for animal consumption.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much Alar was sold in the United Kingdom in 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Such information is not collected by my Department.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will bring up to date the information in the reply dated 28 July 1988, *Official Report*, columns *389-90*, concerning the European Community agricultural budget and outturn and the United Kingdom contribution; and if he will add the forecast up until 1991 as used in the compilation of the forecast in the public expenditure White Paper (Cm 621).

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information requested is set out in the table. The United Kingdom contributes to the budget as a whole rather than to individual components, so the figures shown for the United Kingdom contribution are notional. It is not the Government's practice to produce calendar year forecasts for future years.

	Original budget (concluding supplementary budgets)	*Supplementary budget*	*Outturn*	*National United Kingdom contribution*	*United Kingdom receipts*	*Conversion rota*
	mua	*mua*	*mua*	*mua*	*mua*	*lmu = £*
1973	3,263	—	3,786	333	152	0·416667
1974	3,839	—	3,228	355	279	0·416667
1975	4,306	—	4,914	668	848	0·416667
1976	5,490	717	5,793	939	517	0·416667
1977	6,581	934	6,964	1,340	422	0·416667
	mecu	*mecu*	*mecu*	*mecu*	*mecu*	*lecu = £*
1978	9,131	—	9,000	1,386	480	0·663759
1979	10,022	725	10,880	1,904	593	0·649236
1980	11,878	—	11,943	2,484	941	0·805540
1981	13,401	−1,070	11,581	2,490	1,198	0·556891
1982	14,533	—	13,077	3,165	1,357	0·557801
1983	14,786	1,763	16,637	3,677	1,849	0·586581
1984	17,288	1,848	19,092	4,166	2,244	0·583969
1985	20,755	—	20,549	4,011	2,016	0·588051
1986	23,104	—	23,028	3,340	2,084	0·647851
1987[1]	24,174	−73	23,963	3,882	1,840	0·719320
1988[2]	29,001	—	na	na	na	0·662252
1989[3]	28,618	—	na	na	na	0·645161

Source: EC budget, EAGGF financial reports, EC Court of Auditors reports, implementation of the budget reports.

Notes: Before 1978, Community expenditure was expressed in units of account. As this unit had a different basis from the present ecu the figures for 1973-77 are not directly comparable with those for later years.

[1] Covers expenditure on market support for first 10 months only. In addition the PDB contains 640 mecu for depreciation of old stocks, 800 mecu for reimbursement of butter disposals in 1987-88 and a monetary reserve of 1,000 mecu.

[2] Covers expenditure on market support from November 1987 to 15 October 1988. In addition, the budget contains provision of 1,240 mecu for depreciation of old stocks and a monetary reserve of 1,000 mecu.

[3] Covers expenditure on market support from 16 October 1989 to 15 October 1989. In addition the PDB contains 640 mecu for depreciation of old stocks, 800 mecu for reimbursement of butter disposals in 1987-88 and a monetary reserve of 1,000 mecu.

Insecticides (Cattle)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has of residues in cattle hides resulting from the use of pour-on insecticides; and if he has any evidence of any consequential problems for the tannery industry.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Like all veterinary medical products, pour-on insecticides for use on cattle are subject to the licensing requirements of the Medicines Act 1968. A licence is granted only if the company making a product can show that it is effective and of good quality and can be used safely. I am not aware of any problems in the tanning industry.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals in

Northern Ireland in the last year after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses, having been proved vulnerable boarders, subsequently became voluntary boarders.

Mr. Needham: This information is not available.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many local authority residential places are currently available for those discharged from mental illness hospitals in Northern Ireland; what is the current rate of occupancy; and what are the projected figures for the next two years.

Mr. Needham: Statutory residential accommodation for the mentally ill in Northern Ireland is provided by the four health and social services boards. On 31 December 1987 the boards' homes and hostels provided 202 places for the mentally ill. The occupancy rate was 73·3 per cent. Information on projected figures for the next two years is not available centrally.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many mental illness beds there were in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and what was the rate of occupancy; and what is the planned number for the current year.

Mr. Needham: The numbers for each of the last five years for which information is available are as follows:

Year	*Beds*	*Occupancy rate*
1983	4,732	79·3
1984	4,599	78·8
1985	4,478	81·99
1986	4,330	79·7
1987	4,163	80·2

The planned number for the current year is not available centrally.

River Roe

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to extend the European Community salmonid designation to the tributary streams of the River Roe.

Mr. Needham: As explained in my answer of 1 March 1988 at column *524*, it is the Department's intention to extend designation of salmonid waters under the European Community directive 78/659/EEC as soon as resources permit. Consideration will then be given to designating the tributary streams of the River Roe together with other eligible rivers in Northern Ireland.

Under-age Drinking

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the introduction on 22 March 1989 in the Province of an over-18 card by the Federation of the Retail Licensed Trade of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: I welcome the federation's action, which should assist in combating the problem of under-age drinking.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the current pupil-teacher ratios for both primary and secondary education in each of the education and library board areas in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Available information relates to the 1987-88 school year and is as follows:

Education and library board	[1] *Primary*	[2] *Secondary*
Belfast	22·6	13·9
Western	23·6	15·2
North-Eastern	23·5	14·9
South-Eastern	23·7	15·0
Southern	24·2	15·0

[1] Includes nursery classes in primary schools and preparatory departments of grammar schools.
[2] Consists of secondary intermediate schools and secondary departments of grammar schools.

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the reply of 9 March, *Official Report*, column 1024, to the hon. Member for Brent, East, what is the precise number of other claims for compensation from ex-residents of the Kincora boys' home which are being processed; and if he will make a statement on the length of time taken to agree such settlements.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* In addition to the three claims which have been settled, eight other claims from ex-residents of Kincora boys' home are currently being processed. Settlements are normally the result of negotiations between parties and their legal advisers and I am not privy to them.

Disability

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the survey of disability in Northern Ireland will take account of the criticisms made by the Disablement Income Group of the surveys undertaken by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* The study of disability in Northern Ireland is modelled closely on the study carried out in Great Britain by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys so as to facilitate valid comparisons of the findings. As in Great Britain, the views of the Disablement Income Group will be taken into account in considering the findings of the Northern Ireland study.

Anti-terrorist Co-operation (Firearms)

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will state the conditions with regard to the carrying of firearms which have to be observed by police officers from the Republic of Ireland whilst in Northern Ireland for the purpose of discussing anti-terrorist co-operation with their counterparts in the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 14 April 1989]:* A police officer from the Republic of Ireland, like any visitor,

may not lawfully carry a firearm in Northern Ireland unless he is in possession of the appropriate authorisation from the Chief Constable of the RUC.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Chief Adjudication Officer (Report)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking in response to the recommendations contained in the annual report of the chief adjudication officer, 1987-88.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The recommendations contained in the annual report of the chief adjudication officer, 1987-88 are currently being considered and the responses will be published in the next annual report as is the normal practice.

Attendance Allowance

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for attendance allowance there were in each of the last five years; how many of these claims were *(a)* unsuccessful, *(b)* awarded the lower rate and *(c)* awarded the higher rate; how many of the successful claims (i) satisfied the attendance conditions and (ii) satisfied the supervision conditions; and how many of the unsuccessful claims were applied for on grounds of meeting the supervision conditions.

Mr. Scott: Not all the requested information is available: the information which is available is in the table.

Attendance Allowance
Initial Claims 1984-1988
Numbers Received and Decided, Disallowed and Awards Made

Year	*Claims received and decided*	*Claims disallowed*	*Awards made*	
			Higher rate	*Lower rate*
1988	318,600	110,527	74,058	133,795
1987	300,581	91,888	78,338	130,355
1986	250,561	76,497	61,457	112,607
1985	255,125	70,526	66,218	118,381
1984	239,804	57,430	67,445	114,325

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has completed his review of the introduction of attendance allowance for severely mentally and physically disabled children under the age of two years.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 22 February at column *682*.

"Poverty"

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy with regard to the use of the word "poverty" in official governmental reports.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is our policy that, in reports prepared by the Department, the word "poverty" should be used whenever it is the appropriate word.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table using regional classification to show expenditure in 1988-89 on supplementary benefit payments for occupants of *(a)* private residential homes and *(b)* hostels.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The table shows the estimated expenditure on payments of income support to people in private and voluntary residential care homes. I regret that reliable figures for hostel cases are not available.

Social security region	*Annual equivalent expenditure (nearest £ million)*
North Eastern	64
London North	78
London South	125
Wales/South West	99
Midlands	73
North Western	76
Scotland	39
Great Britain	555

Source: August 1988 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry.

Vaccine Damage Payments

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many vaccine damage payments were made in 1987; and if he will categorise these according to the age of the child, when the vaccination took place, the year of the vaccination and the nature of the vaccination.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Ten payments were awarded in 1987 under the provisions of the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979. Details are in the table.

Vaccine damage payments scheme awards made in 1987 by age of child at date of vaccination; year of vaccination and type of vaccination

	Age at date of vaccination (months)	*Year vaccine was given*	*Type of vaccination cited on the claim form*
1	3-6	1981	Triple
2	3-6	1983	Pertussis
3	3-6	1979	Triple/polio
4	3-6	1984	Triple/polio
5	6-9	1978	Pertussis
6	3-6	1985	Polio
7	3-6	1982	Triple/polio
8	3-6	1984	Pertussis
9	6-9	1985	Triple/polio
10	3-6	1983	Triple/polio

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide figures indicating the proportion of people of pensionable age in receipt of inflation-proofed occupational pensions in the following age bands *(a)* 60 to 65 years, *(b)* 65 to 70 years, *(c)* 70 to 75 years, *(d)* 75 to 80 years, *(e)* 80 to 85 years and *(f)* 85 years and over.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that the information requested is not available.

National Insurance

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the national insurance contributions yield in 1989-90 and the first full year of the proposed reformed system for those workers at or below

(a) 25 per cent. average earnings, *(b)* 33 per cent. average earnings, *(c)* 50 per cent. average earnings, *(d)* average earnings, *(e)* twice average earnings, *(f)* five times average earnings, *(g)* 10 times average earnings, and *(h)* £150 per week.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The information is as follows:

Estimated yield: Class 1 primary national insurance contributions

£ billions

Earnings at or below	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
(a) 25 per cent. average earnings	0·1	0·1
(b) 33 per cent. average earnings	0·3	0·3
(c) 50 per cent. average earnings	1·0	1·0
(d) average earnings	6·5	6·2
(e) twice average earnings	12·8	12·5
(f) *(g)* three times average earnings	13·4	13·1
(h) £150 per week	2·2	1·7
All earners	13·7	13·4

The Government Actuary's Department has supplied the estimate of the yield from national insurance contributions. Average earnings are those of all full-time male and female employees. Insufficient information is available to enable the yield from people earning five and 10 times the average to be calculated, and the table, therefore, includes figures based on earnings of three times average earnings and of all earners instead. All figures are rounded.

Disabled People and Deaf People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of money given under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 to *(a)* all organisations working with and for disabled people and *(b)* all organisations working with and for deaf people, for each year from 1980 to the latest available date.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* I have been asked to reply.

The following table, which relates to England only, gives as close an estimate as possible of the amounts given in each of the financial years 1979-80 to 1988-89 under the section 64 general scheme to *(a)* organisations working exclusively or primarily with or for physically disabled and sensorily impaired people; and *(b)* organisations working with or for deaf and hearing-impaired people. These totals do not include grants paid to some organisations concerned with specific medical conditions or organisations working primarily with mentally handicapped or mentally ill people, even though some of these also work with physically disabled people. Also excluded are the awards recently made following the error in calculating the retail prices index. During the period specified by the hon. Member, grants paid under the section 64 general scheme to organisations working with physically disabled and/or sensorily impaired people totalled approximately £20·2 million. Of that, approximately £2·03 million was awarded to organisations working with or for deaf or hearing impaired people.

	Total disabled	*Deaf/hearing impaired*
	£	*£*
1979-80	1,058,457	54,060
1980-81	1,641,283	155,420
1981-82	[1]2,031,507	158,600
1982-83	1,837,190	173,333
1983-84	2,129,394	289,500
1984-85	2,153,267	193,054
1985-86	2,339,083	241,950
1986-87	2,535,750	232,000
1987-88	2,528,043	256,300
1988-89	[2]1,975,965	273,944

[1] This total includes the continuation of a number of grants related to the International Year of the Disabled in 1981.

[2] This total excludes the sum of £686,000 paid to Motability in 1988-89, as that grant was removed from the Section 64 general scheme in that year. Grants to Motability are included in the totals for earlier years.

ENERGY

Margam Pit

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he now anticipates that a start will be made on the Margam pit.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The timing and priority of major projects is a matter for British coal, which keeps its capital expenditure programme under regular review. In the case of Margam, the timing will depend on the successful conclusion of a detailed agreement on six-day working and an up-to-date assessment of the project's commercial prospects.

EMPLOYMENT

Construction Industry (Accidents)

14. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will estimate the number of accidents that go unreported in the construction industry.

95. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will estimate the number of accidents that go unreported in the construction industry.

Mr. Nicholls: All cases of fatal injury in the course of work activity are reported to the enforcement authorities. It is not known what proportion of other reportable injuries to people employed in construction go unreported, but it is thought to be significantly more than 50 per cent.

63. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the fatal and major injury rates in construction industries in 1974, 1978 and 1988.

128. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the fatal and major injury rates in construction industries in 1974, 1978 and 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information for employees is shown in the table. More than one third of the people employed in the industry are classified as self-employed. Prior to 1981, injuries to the self-employed were not reportable and under current regulations they are not reportable for self-employed people working on their own. Figures for the self-employed are therefore not included in the table, but the provisional 1987-88 figure for the number of employees and self-employed killed in the course of construction activity was 141.

Injury rates per 100,000 employees in the construction industry[1]

	Fatal Injuries	[2]*Major Injuries*	[3]*All reported Injuries*
1974	13·6	n/a	2,830
1978	10·4	n/a	2,976
[4]1987-8	10·1	206·6	1,914

[1] Defined as Order 20 of the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification in 1974 and 1978 and Division 5 of the 1980 SIC in 1987-88.
[2] The classification of injuries as major was first introduced in 1981.
[3] Includes all reported injuries causing more than three days' absence from work. Comparisons between years may be affected by variable under-reporting of non-fatal injuries.
[4] Provisional.
n/a Not available.

Factory Inspectors

16. **Mr. Heffer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors have left the Health and Safety Executive in the last 12 months; and how many were retirements and how many resignations.

Mr. Nicholls: Of the 39 factory inspectors who left the Health and Safety Executive between 31 March 1988 and 1 April 1989, eight retired and 27 resigned. A further four transferred to other Government Departments.

33. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors were conducting preventive inspections on the following dates: 6 June 1988, 7 September 1988 and 23 January 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: Factory inspectors in the Health and Safety Executive's area offices are not employed solely on preventive inspection but also make visits in response to accidents or other incidents, complaints, inquiries or to follow up previously identified shortcomings.

Staffing figures are recorded on the first of each month. The numbers of factory inspectors in area offices on 1 June 1988, 1 September 1988 and 1 February 1989 were 520, 522 and 533 respectively.

51. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many additional factory inspectors would be required to enable the percentage of reported accidents investigated to rise to 10 per cent.

Mr. Nicholls: Information is not available in the form requested. Health and Safety Executive plans are not expressed in terms of a fixed percentage of reported accidents to be investigated. The 1989-90 plans provide for some 10,800 investigations of incidents (including occupational diseases, and dangerous occurrences, as well as accidents) reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Industrial Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations. This compares with 9,900 planned in 1988-89.

80. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of construction factory inspectors in post as at 1 April.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 April 1989 there were 99·5 inspectors employed on the inspection of construction activities.

133. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the target numbers set for preventive inspections for factory inspectors in 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive's Factory Inspectorate does not set target numbers for preventive inspections and therefore the information requested is not available.

134. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of factory inspectors in post in 1979, 1987 and 1989 on 1 April.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 April 1979, 1987 and 1989 the Health and Safety Executive employed 742·5, 621·5 and 604 factory inspectors respectively.

Early Retirement

19. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to encourage mature experienced workers to remain in their jobs and not take early retirement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Government believe that the age at which a person retires is a matter to be settled between the individual and the employer. As the numbers of young people decline, it will increasingly be in employers' interests to make full use of the contribution which mature, experienced workers can make, and the Government are using a range of media to put this message across.

Compact Initiative

20. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many schools are currently taking part in the compact initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The Training Agency has received proposals for operational compacts in 28 inner city areas to date. These plans indicate that once the proposals are approved and begin operation in September a total of 260 schools in these areas will be covered. All compacts have plans to expand in subsequent years.

The quality of applications have been impressive and show what can be achieved when education and business work together to meet the needs of their locality.

YTS

21. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of YTS trainees in 1986-87 gained a vocational qualification during their time on YTS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The figure for the period 1986-87 relates to all qualifications, vocational qualifications cannot be separately identified. A total of 21 per cent. of young people who left during 1986-87 gained a qualification while on YTS.

Figures for the latest available period (two years up to October 1988) show that 65 per cent. of young people completing YTS gained a qualification.

Employment Ministers

22. **Mr. Ground:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the Employment Ministers of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries to discuss levels of employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: There are no current plans for joint meetings with Ministers from other member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Levels of employment in the United Kingdom compare very favourably with those of other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. In the United Kingdom, a greater proportion of the population is in employment than is the case in our major European competitors and in many other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. This is partly the result of the rapid employment growth we have enjoyed since 1983.

28. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the Employment Ministers of the United Kingdom's European Community partners to discuss levels of unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

48. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he proposes to meet the Employment Ministers of the European Community to discuss the social proposals of the European Final Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I refer my hon. Friends to my statement on the last European Community Social Affairs Council, which appeared in the *Official Report* on 12 April 1989 at column *588*. The next meeting of Labour and Social Affairs Ministers will be on 12 June at a meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council. The United Kingdom will continue its efforts to ensure that training and employment growth are Community priorities. In the meantime, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are continuing our programme of bilateral contacts with members states.

New Businesses

24. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many businesses were started during the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: In 1987, the latest year for which figures have been published, the estimated number of new registrations for value-added tax was 205,000. The net increase in the number of VAT-registered businesses in 1987 was 45,000, or nearly 900 a week on average. The indications are that the rate of increase during 1988 has been faster.

Small Businesses (Advice)

25. **Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his plans for co-operation between enterprise agencies and training and enterprise councils for the delivery of advice to small businesses.

Mr. Cope: Support for new and expanding businesses will be a key responsibility for training and enterprise councils. They will assess what advice and other services are needed in their area and will seek to develop a coherent high quality system of support through local enterprise agencies and others who already contribute to the aim of assisting small business growth.

Training and Enterprise Councils

26. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the introduction of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Fowler: I have no immediate plans to meet the Director-General of the CBI. The CBI has strongly supported our proposals to introduce training and enterprise councils and I look forward to its continued involvement as the initiative develops.

49. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received on the introduction of training and enterprise councils.

73. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress is being made on establishing training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

91. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from industry and commerce in response to his plans to set up training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I published a prospectus on 10 March inviting employers to form training and enterprise councils. The response from employers has been excellent; almost 4,000 individuals and organisations have expressed an interest.

93. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the number of employers likely to be involved with the training and business programmes which will be organised by the training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Cope: Training and enterprise councils will ensure that a greater number of employers are involved with training and enterprise activities at a local level. One of the major tasks of TECs will be to encourage employers to invest in training and developing their own staff as well as supporting the training and business programmes of the TEC. I published a prospectus on 10 March inviting employers to form TECs. Response has been excellent and there is already considerable interest throughout the country.

Mines (Occupational Health Services)

27. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the levels of occupational health services provided by British Coal under the requirements of the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act 1946 and by private sector employers in mines and quarries.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 replaced earlier legislative requirements relating to provision of occupational health services. There are no specific requirements as to how this should be implemented by employers in the mining and quarrying industries. However, British Coal provides an extensive range of services and employ over 600 qualified staff to operate them. Full details of this are published in the annual report of the British Coal medical service. No such detailed information is available for non-British Coal mines or for quarries.

Small Firms Service

30. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for the future of the small firms service following the creation of training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The small firms service now forms part of the Training Agency. This brings together the closely linked services of counselling and training, and will lead to a more coherent and effective approach to small business support.

The training and enterprise councils will become responsible for the counselling activity of the SFS. This will help ensure that TECs become the natural focus for the local small business support network.

The SFS will maintain its counselling service in each area covered now until a TEC is established. The SFS information service will remain as a national service.

Employment Training

32. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people currently in training on the employment training programme had previously been unemployed for two years or more; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Figures for those currently in training on employment training who were previously unemployed for two years or more are not available. However, of the 239,000 entrants to the programme by 31 March, it is estimated that some 38 per cent. or 91,000 had been unemployed for two years or more. This is an outstanding achievement as the programme is specially aimed at the longer-term unemployed.

85. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many local authorities have supported employment training; and how many have opposed it.

Mr. Nicholls: As at 28 February 1989, a total of 263 local authorities were participating in employment training as training agents or training managers. There is no record held centrally by the Training Agency on the number of local authorities which have decided not to participate.

90. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently undertaking training on employment training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: By 31 March there were over 175,000 people in training. They clearly recognise the benefits the programme has to offer and the opportunity it provides to help them get a job.

Tourism

35. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the future of section 4 grants for tourism.

Mr. Lee: The section 4 scheme of assistance is being considered as one of a range of issues arising from the review of tourism policy. An announcement about the outcome of that review of policy, including the future of the section 4 scheme, will be made in due course.

114. **Mr. Bevan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current capital investment in the hotel and tourism industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on 14 March 1989, *Official Report*, column *195*.

116. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to promote industrial tourism in the north-east of England.

Mr. Lee: Every opportunity will be taken to promote the benefits of industrial tourism in all parts of the country including the north-east and I welcome the initiative of the Northumbria tourist board to encourage more companies to open their doors to visitors by organising a conference on industrial tourism on 19 June at the Nissan factory, Washington new town.

Benefit Fraud

36. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest figure for savings for 1988 as a result of investigations of fraudulent claims; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The net benefit saving from my Department's fraud investigation work during 1988 was £65 million.

101. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were prosecuted for benefit fraud offences as a result of investigations by unemployment benefit fraud officers between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: As a result of investigations into benefit fraud offences, my Department prosecuted 3,981 people during the period from 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989.

Competent Persons

37. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will meet the chair of the Health and Safety Commission to discuss the role of competent persons.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. Many provisions in health and safety legislation require specified tasks to be carried out by competent persons. The Health and Safety Commission keeps these provisions under review. If the commission wishes to make proposals to my right hon. Friend which would affect the role of competent persons in any particular area, he will consider those proposals most carefully.

Pre-entry Closed Shop

39. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his proposals to reform the pre-entry closed shop.

Mr. Nicholls: Our Green Paper "Removing Barriers to Employment", which was published on 20 March, contains the proposal that legislation should provide a right of complaint to an industrial tribunal for any individual whom an employer refuses to engage on the

ground of non-membership of a trade union or of any particular trade union, or on the ground of refusal to agree that he will become a member after his employment has started. The Government believe that this proposal, together with existing legislation, would create a climate in which individuals will no longer have their livelihoods threatened simply because they are not members of a particular union or do not wish to belong to any union.

42. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has as to the number of workers in the United Kingdom covered by pre-entry closed shop restrictions.

Mr. Nicholls: Our Green Paper "Removing Barriers to Employment", which was published on 20 March, estimates the total number of people covered by all types of pre-entry closed shop arrangements in Great Britain as being of the order of 1·3 million. This estimate is derived from a recently specially commissioned survey, a summary of which has been placed in the Library.

70. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received following the publication of his Green Paper "Removing Barriers to Employment" on the reform of the closed shop; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Our Green Paper "Removing Barriers to Employment" was published on 20 March and the closing date for comments will be 20 June. We are, therefore, in the very early stages of the consultation period. To date we have received four representations on our proposal concerning the pre-entry closed shop and all expressed support for the Government's proposals.

Literacy and Numeracy

41. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what special help is given to the unemployed who need training in literacy and numeracy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Considerable help is available to enable unemployed people receive literacy and numeracy training through YTS and ET. Additional support in YTS became available at the beginning of April through improved levels of funding. In ET, almost one in five trainees is receiving literacy and numeracy training. Further initiatives to improve the quality of provision are in hand.

Chemical Industry (Accidents)

45. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the fatal and major injury rates in the chemical industries in 1974, 1978 and 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information is shown in the table.

Injury rates per 100,000 employees in the clinical industry[1]

	Fatal injuries	[2]*Major injuries*	[3]*All reported injuries*
[4]1974	11·3	n/a	2,419
1978	3·2	n/a	2,699
[5]1987-88	1·2	160·4	1,051

[1] Defined as Order 5 of the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification in 1974 and 1978 and Class 25 of the 1980 SIC in 1987-88.

[2] The classification on injuries as major was first introduced in 1981.

[3] Includes all reported injuries causing more than 3 days absence from work. Comparisons between years may be affected by variable under-reporting of non-fatal injuries.

[4] Includes 28 people killed and 36 others who were injured by the explosion at the Flixborough Works and NYPRO (UK) Limited on 1 June 1984.

[5] Provisional.

106. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will estimate the number of accidents that go unreported in the chemical industry.

Mr. Nicholls: All cases of fatal injury in the course of work activity are reported to the enforcement authorities. It is not known what proportion of other reportable injuries to people employed in the chemical industry go unreported, but it is thought that it may be less than 50 per cent.

Salmonella

46. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what work the employment medical advisory service is currently undertaking on salmonella poisoning in poultry workers.

105. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what work the employment medical advisory service is currently undertaking on salmonella poisoning in poultry workers.

Mr. Nicholls: The employment medical advisory service is not aware of any cases of salmonella poisoning in poultry workers. However, the Health and Safety Executive has established a task force on occupational zoonoses, that is, diseases transmissable from animals to man. The task force will be considering the possible transmission of salmonella in the workplace as part of its remit. It will also be examining proposals for a study to investigate salmonella in air from poultry houses.

King's Cross Fire

54. **Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the Health and Safety Executive's research budget was expended as a result of the King's Cross fire investigations.

Mr. Nicholls: Some 5 per cent. of the budget of the executive's research and laboratory services division was expended on the King's Cross fire investigation.

Dangerous Machinery

55. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to improve current standards relating to the guarding of dangerous machinery.

Mr. Nicholls: I am satisfied that the standards required under United Kingdom legislation for the guarding of machinery are already high and I see no need for further legislation at present. However, we are awaiting the adoption of two European Community directives which may require some changes to United Kingdom legislation in due course.

Health and Safety Executive (Research)

56. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of the Health and Safety Executive's medical division budget for extra-mural research in 1986, 1987, 1988 and the current financial year.

Mr. Nicholls: Annual budgets for extramural biomedical research managed by the Health and Safety Executive's medical division for each of the four years are as follows:

Year	£
1986-87	1,411,000
1987-88	1,435,000
1988-89	1,506,000
1989-90	1,529,000

Young People (Fatalities)

59. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people aged 18 and under have been killed at work in each of the past three years.

Mr. Nicholls: Figures from all enforcing authorities show that in the year ended 31 March 1987, a total of 21 young people aged 16 to 18 were reported as killed in the couse of their employment. The corresponding provisional figure for the year ended 31 March 1988 is 19. I regret that figures for earlier years are not available on this basis.

Wages Inspectorate (Prosecutions)

62. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions were undertaken by the wages inspectorate south-east division in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Nicholls: Four prosecutions were instituted by the south-east division in the last 10 years. One of these was in 1986, two in 1987 and one in 1988.

Wages Inspectorate (Wales)

65. **Mrs. Clwyd** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the reduction in the wages inspectorate in Wales and its impact on rates of pay in Mountain Ash and the Cynon Valley.

Mr. Nicholls: The reduction of inspection activity in Wales was part of a general reduction throughout Great Britain in 1986-87. It reflected the simpler and quicker task of checking compliance with wages orders and the expectation that the level of compliance would rise following the reform of the wages council system in 1986. There is no simple link between wages inspection and rates of pay, but in Wales, as in Great Britain as a whole, the percentage of workers found to be underpaid in checks by the wages inspectorate has reduced. Inspection results are not available for areas smaller than Wales as a whole.

Skill Training

74. **Sir Hal Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the national training task force to discuss the improvement of levels of skill amongst the United Kingdom work force.

Mr. Cope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have frequent meetings with Mr. Wolfson, the chairman of the national training task force. He will be advising me on the establishment of the new training and enterprise councils and their plans for improving the skills of the work force in their area.

Productivity

75. **Mr. Neil Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the increase in productivity for the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Productivity in manufacturing, as measured by output per person employed, was 6·5 per cent. greater in the three months ending February 1989 than in the corresponding period ending February 1988. This compares favourably with the average of 4·2 per cent. a year recorded for the period 1979 to 1988. Since 1980 growth in United Kingdom manufacturing productivity has exceeded that of the other major industrialised countries.

Productivity for the economy as a whole was 0·5 per cent. higher in the fourth quarter of 1988 than it was in the fourth quarter of 1987. However the 1988 figure was adversely affected by the Piper Alpha disaster and other oil industry interruptions.

VDUs (Health Risks)

76. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what work is currently being undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive's medical division on the health risks of visual display units.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive has published a guidance note and a free booklet on VDUs and is participating in the development of national and international standards for VDUs, including discussions within the European Community on a proposed VDU directive. The executive is also supporting four research projects in universities and research institutes on, or directly related to working with VDUs.

British Venture Capital Association

78. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the British Venture Capital Association to discuss the development of small businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I have no immediate plans to meet the chairman of the BVCA in the near future but I do have regular contact with the association.

Agriculture (Accidents)

79. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will estimate the number of accidents that go unreported in the agriculture industry.

Mr. Nicholls: All cases of fatal injury in the course of agricultural work activities are reported to the Health and Safety Executive's Her Majesty's agricultural inspectorate. It is not known what proportion of other reportable accidents from agricultural activities go unreported, but it is thought to be more than 50 per cent.

104. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many children died in accidents on agricultural premises in 1974, 1979, 1984 and 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The figures for fatal accidents to children under the age of 16 years on agricultural premises for the years in question are:

	Number
1974	25
1979	24
1984	4
[1]1988	10

[1] Provisional.

119. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the fatal and major injury rates for agriculture in 1974, 1978 and 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information for employees is shown in the table. It has not been possible to produce a series of injury rates for the large number of self-employed and others involved in agricultural activity.

Injury rates per 100,000 employees in the agricultural industry[1]

	Fatal injuries	*Major injuries*[2]
1974	8·7	n/a
1978	7·1	n/a
[3]1987-88	5·8	152·8

[1] Defined as minimum list heading 001 of the 1968 standard industrial classification in 1974 and 1978 and class 01 of the 1980 SIC in 1987-88.

[2] The classification of injuries as major was first introduced in 1981.

[3] Provisional.

Community Programme

82. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline recent or proposed changes in the community programme.

Mr. Nicholls: From 5 September 1988 the community programme was replaced by the adult training programme, employment training.

Unemployment Register

84. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will review the Government's ruling which prevents men over 60 years from registering as unemployed.

Mr. Nicholls: There is no ruling preventing men aged over 60 from claiming unemployment benefit in the normal way. Under a special concession men, over 60 who do not qualify for UB or whose entitlement is exhausted may claim income support and—or be credited with national insurance contributions without regularly attending the unemployment benefit office to sign on as unemployed. Jobcentre services are available to everyone, regardless of whether they are claiming at a UBO and staff are happy to discuss options with anyone seeking work, whatever their age.

Enterprise Agencies

86. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his future plans for enterprise agencies.

Mr. Cope: Responsibility for the future development of local enterprise agencies, which are independent private sector led organisations, rests primarily with their boards and private sector backers.

The introduction of training and enterprise councils will provide those LEAs able to demonstrate high-quality service with the opportunity to contract for counselling and other enterprise programmes.

Elderly People (Job Prospects)

88. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government has taken to improve job prospects for the elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Government believe that the best way to improve job prospects for all age groups is to maintain a strong economy and to allow the labour market to work efficiently. Recruitment decisions must be left to employers, but in making them they should not discriminate unfairly on age grounds. Demographic trends make it particularly important at present that the contribution which older workers can make to the economy is fully utilised. We are putting these messages across to employers through various media, and I am encouraged by evidence that some firms are already adopting a more positive approach in their recruitment and employment practices.

Construction Industry (Training)

108. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the current statutory arrangements for training in the construction industry.

Mr. Nicholls: The Construction Industry Training Board was established by the Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1964 for the purpose of encouraging the adequate training of persons employed or intending to be employed in the construction industry.

As envisaged in the White Paper "Employment for the 1990s" (Cm. 540) I have asked the chairman of the board to bring forward proposals for future arrangements.

Mining (Accidents)

109. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the fatal and major injury rates in mining in 1974, 1978 and 1988.

131. **Mr. Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the fatal and major injury rates in mining in 1974, 1978 and 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information is shown in the table:

Injuries in the mining industry reported to enforcing authorities[5]

	Fatal	*Serious/ major*	*Incidence rates (per 100,000 employees) Fatal*	*Serious/ major*
1974				
Coal mines[4]	48	[2]497	18·7	[2]193·6
Other mines	2	[2]14	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	50	[2]511	n/a	n/a
1978				
Coal mines[4]	63	[2]494	25·4	[2]199·1
Other mines	6	[2]17	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	69	[2]511	n/a	n/a

			Incidence rates (per 100,000 employees)	
	Fatal	Serious/ major	Fatal	Serious/ major
1987-88[5]				
Coal mines[4]	12	[3]756	11·2	[3]708·5
Other mines	1	[3]14	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	13	[3]770	n/a	n/a

n/a—Not available.
[1] Reported to HSE's Inspectorate of Mines and Quarries and all other relevant enforcing authorities.
[2] Serious injuries as reported under 1954 Mines and Quarries Act.
[3] Major injuries as reported under the Reporting af Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1985, which widened the definition of serious injury as compared with the 1954 Act definition.
[4] Excludes opencast coal mining.
[5] Provisional data for the year commencing 1 April 1987.

136. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of accidents in coal mining in the last 12 months occurred in private coal mines.

Mr. Nicholls: Provisional accident figures for the 12-month period ending 31 March 1989 indicate that fatal and major injuries at private coal mines represented 10 per cent. and 3·3 per cent. respectively of the total reported accidents in these categories at all coal mines.

It is not possible to differentiate the over three-day accidents recorded under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 without incurring disproportionate cost.

Skill Shortages

111. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received in the last six months regarding skill shortages in the south-east.

Mr. Cope: In addition to seven questions asked in the House, we have been approached by two organisations in the last six months, regarding skill shortages in the south-east or in London.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

117. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the target figure for the number of nuclear installations inspectors to be in post by 1 April 1989; and what are the target figures for 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1991.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive planned to have 140 nuclear installations inspectors in post on 1 April 1989 and to increase this to 160 by 1 April 1990. Staffing beyond these dates depends on future work loads which cannot be predicted with precision.

Young Workers (Accidents)

121. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met representatives of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive to discuss the accident rates of young people at work.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend's meeting with representatives of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive cover the full range of their responsibilities.

Young people's accident rates have been raised in correspondence in the context of the Department's consultative document "Restrictions on the Employment of Young People and the Removal of Sex Discrimination in legislation".

124. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he intends taking to reduce the number of accidents to young people at work.

Mr. Nicholls: Latest figures from the Health and Safety Executive suggest that injury rates for young people aged 16 to 24 are now lower than the corresponding injury rates for employees as a whole. The Government will continue to support the efforts of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive to reduce accidents to workers of all ages.

Secondary Industrial Action

125. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received on the proposals contained in his Green Paper to reform further the law covering secondary industrial action.

Mr. Nicholls: Our Green Paper "Removing Barriers to Employment" was published on 20 March and the closing date for comments is 20 June. We are, therefore, in the very early stages of the consultation period. To date, one representation has been received on these Green Paper proposals.

"Employment for the 1990s"

126. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received in response to the White Paper, "Employment for the 1990s."

Mr. Cope: We have received several hundred representations following publication of the White Paper "Employment for the 1990s", the majority of which have expressed interest in and support for the introduction of training and enterprise councils. The prospectus inviting local groups led by employers to submit proposals for forming training and enterprise councils in their areas was published on 10 March.

Agriculture Safety Inspectorate

127. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the frequency with which the agricultural safety inspectorate plans to visit all the premises for which it is responsible.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive's agricultural inspectorate's programme of preventive visits is planned on the basis of a rating system. There is no fixed period between inspections; premises with poor standards, poor management or high-risk potential being inspected more frequently. Visits to investigate accidents, dangerous occurrences and complaints are made on a reactive basis.

Harbour Areas (Safety)

130. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the implementation of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations in harbour areas.

Mr. Nicholls: The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations which come into force on 1 October,

will apply to any store-based work activities in harbour areas where substances hazardous to health are used or given off. The only exceptions will be asbestos, lead and ionising radiations which are covered by other regulations.

The regulations will also apply to certain activities on board ships in dock. The COSHH will not impose duties on the master or crew of a seagoing ship or their employer in relation to the normal shipboard activities of a ship crew under the direction of a master.

Food and Environment Protection Act

132. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training and information has been given to the agricultural inspectorate on environmental assessment associated with the Food and Environment Protection Act.

Mr. Nicholls: Prior to undertaking their enforcement responsibilities under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, the Health and Safety Executive's agricultural inspectors are given a week's specific training on the requirements and implications of the Act. This is supplemented as required by further local and national training.

Agricultural Inspectors

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many agricultural inspectors were conducting preventive inspections on the following dates, 6 June 1988, 7 September 1988 and 23 January 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: Agricultural inspectors in the Health and Safety Executives area offices are not employed solely on preventive inspections but also make visits in response to accidents or other incidents, complaints, inquiries or to follow up previously identified shortcomings.

Staffing figures are recorded on the first of each month. The numbers of agricultural inspectors in area offices on 1 June 1988, 1 September 1988 and 1 February 1989 were 137, 145 and 142 respectively.

Training Scheme Allowance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on *(a)* the future operation of the employment training scheme allowance following the introduction of the community charge in Scotland and *(b)* his plans for its operation in England and Wales after April 1990.

Mr. Nicholls: As announced on 12 April, the benefit-related part of employment training, training allowances will be increased in line with the general uprating in benefits. When he announced this uprating on 27 October 1988, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security explained how the new levels of benefit allow for individual liability for the community charge in Scotland, England and Wales.

Pesticides (Wildlife)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice or recommendations he has received from the Health and Safety Executive on the enforcement of existing, or introduction of new, legislation as a means of helping to reduce the use of pesticides against wildlife.

Mr. Nicholls: The advisory committee on pesticides advises Ministers on pesticides and their usage. All pesticides undergo a full environmental safety assessment before being approved by Ministers for use.

The Health and Safety Executive enforces all aspects of the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 under the terms of an agency agreement. However, where incidents affecting wildlife come to the attention of HSE's inspectors, they refer them to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which has existing arrangements for investigating such incidents.

Hazardous Substances

50. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the differences between the assessment processes required under the Asbestos and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no significant differences.

53. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training is being provided for Health and Safety Executive employees on the implementation and enforcement of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations.

99. **Mr. Leighton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training is being provided for Health and Safety Executive employees on the implementation and enforcement of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive has established a comprehensive programme of internal conferences and special meetings to train its employees on the aspects of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations appropriate to their individual responsibilities. Although the principles of occupational hygiene now enshrined in the regulation are not new to Health and Safety Executive inspectors, doctors and scientists, the training and briefing on the implementation of the regulations now being provided will ensure a consistent approach.

Labour Statistics

31. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are registered as unemployed in Greater London; and what was the comparable figure 10 years ago.

Mr. Nicholls: In March 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in Greater London, was 230,200, compared with 115,700 in March 1979 on a consistent basis.

34. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the average monthly fall in the number of unemployed during the last quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In the quarter ending March 1989, the average fall in unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the United Kingdom was 39,800 per month. Unemployment has now fallen over 32 consecutive months by 1,215,100 since July 1986, the longest and largest sustained fall since the war.

38. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of people employed in a

part-time capacity within the employment areas of South Yorkshire; and what was the comparable position 10 years ago.

Mr. Lee: The available information on a comparable basis is from censuses of employment taken in September 1981 and September 1984. The table gives the available information for each of the travel-to-work areas in South Yorkshire.

More up-to-date estimates from the September 1987 census of employment will become available later this year.

Employees in part-time employment[1] in the travel-to-work areas in South Yorkshire

Travel-to-work areas	*September 1981*	*September 1984*
Barnsley	14,400	13,700
Doncaster	17,300	18,600
Rotherham and Mexborough	17,500	19,900
Sheffield[2]	53,400	56,200

[1] Excludes the self-employed and members of Her Majesty's forces; part-time workers are defined as those working for not more than 30 hours a week.

[2] Not wholly within South Yorkshire.

For the county, the September 1981 and September 1984 figures for employees in part-time employment were 100,000 and 105,800 respectively.

44. **Mr. Richard Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the average monthly fall in the number of unemployed in the west midlands during the last quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In the quarter ending March 1989, the average fall in unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the west midlands was 6,300 per month. Unemployment in the west midlands has fallen by 67,800 or 27·2 per cent. over the last 12 months.

47. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of employment in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in the Yorkshire and Humberside region was 2,160,000. This represents an increase of 169,000 or 8 per cent. since December 1983. The civilian work force in employment is the sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and participants in work-related Government training programmes.

52. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people aged 16 to 18 years were jobless in June 1983 and March 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In March 1989 there were 2,457 people under 18 in the United Kingdom claiming unemployment-related benefits. There were an estimated 190,800 in June 1983.

The recent extension of the guaranteed offer of a YTS place to all those aged under 18 not in full-time education or employment means there is now no need for these young people to be unemployed. Consequently, only a few now remain entitled to unemployment-related benefits following the associated changes from September 1988 in the benefit regulations for people aged under 18.

57. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of employment in the west midlands.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in the west midlands region was 2,471,000. This represents an increase of 298,000 or 14 per cent. since December 1983. The civilian work force in employment is the sum of employees in employment, self-employed and participants in work-related Government training programmes.

60. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the fall in unemployment in the east midlands during the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In the 12 months to March 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the east midlands fell by 34,500 or 22·6 per cent. on a consistent basis.

61. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment.

Mr. Nicholls: In March 1989 unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the United Kingdom was 1,918,100, the lowest for more than eight years on a consistent basis. Unemployment has now fallen for 32 months running, giving the longest and largest continuous fall since the war.

64. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of employment in the east midlands.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in the east midlands region was 1,844,000. This represents an increase of 221,000 or 14 per cent. since December 1983. The civilian work force in employment is the sum of employees in employment, self-employed and participants in work-related Government training programmes.

67. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the employment trends in the east midlands for 1989.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in the east midlands was 1,844,000. My Department does not produce forecasts or estimate trends.

69. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of long-term unemployment in London.

Mr. Nicholls: In January 1989 the number of unemployed claimants who had been unemployed for one year or more in Greater London was 98,786, a fall of 58,202 or 37·1 per cent. compared with two years ago. This comparison is affected slightly by the change in the coverage of the count from September 1988 due to the new benefit regulations affecting those aged under 18.

72. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the rate of the fall in unemployment in the last 12 months in the south-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In March 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the south-west was 104,600, a fall of 40,700 or 28 per cent. since March 1988 on a consistent basis.

81. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of employment in the north of England.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in the northern region was 1,297,000. This represents an increase of 128,000 or 11 per cent. since December 1983. The civilian work force in employment is the sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and participants in work-related Government training programmes.

89. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of long-term unemployed in June 1987 and to date.

Mr. Nicholls: Unemployment figures by duration are calculated on a quarterly basis. In January 1989, the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom who had been unemployed for one year or more was 821,419, compared with 1,238,288 in July 1987—a fall of 416,869 or 33·7 per cent. The comparison is slightly affected by seasonal influences as well as the change in the coverage of the count from September 1988 due to new benefit regulations affecting those young people aged under 18 years.

94. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest total for the numbers of employed and self-employed people in East Anglia.

100. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of employment in East Anglia.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in East Anglia was 1,023,000 of which 138,000 were self-employed. This represents an increase of 229,000 or 29 per cent. since December 1983. The civilian work force in employment is the sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and participants in work-related Government training programmes.

107. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people at present are unemployed in the west midlands, expressed as a percentage of the numbers unemployed in May 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: In March 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the west midlands was 180·8 per cent. of the level in May 1979 on a consistent basis.

113. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the increase in the number of self-employed in the west midlands since June 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, there were an estimated 248,000 self-employed in the west midlands region. This represents an increase of 39,000 or 19 per cent. since June 1987.

This self-employment estimate incorporates the latest LFS results, and will be subject to sampling error.

120. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of employment in the north-west.

Mr. Lee: In December 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian work force in employment in the north-west region was 2,676,000. This represents an increase of 101,000 or 4 per cent. since December 1983. The civilian work force in employment is the sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and participants in work-related Government training programmes.

115. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people aged 18 to 24 years were jobless in June 1983 and March 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Unemployment figures by age are compiled on a quarterly basis. In January 1989 the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom aged 18 to 24 years was 595,734, compared with 966,375 in July 1983—a fall of 370,632 or 38·4 per cent. The comparison is affected by seasonal influences and slightly by the change in the compilation of the count in March 1986 to remove over-recording.

Lost Working Days

122. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many working days were lost through strike action in the first quarter of 1989; and what were the comparable figures for the previous 10 years.

Mr. Nicholls: For the latest three-month period for which data is available, ending February 1989, it is provisionally estimated that 135,000 working days were lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes. Figures for comparable periods in the previous 10 years, together with the latest figure, are shown in the table.

Working days lost in the three months ending February

Year	*Number*
1979	5,933,000
1980	6,219,000
1981	778,000
1982	1,721,000
1983	1,184,000
1984	983,000
1985	6,235,000
1986	685,000
1987	1,914,000
1988	820,000
1989	135,000

Health and Safety Executive

18. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many professional and technological officers the Health and Safety Executive had in place on 1 April.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 April 1989 the Health and Safety Executive employed 29·5 members of the Civil Service professional and technology group. Most are employed by the executive's electrical equipment and certification service.

23. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive's budget provision for the next three years.

Mr. Nicholls: Gross provision for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive in the three years from 1 April last is £118·3 million, £125·9 million and £133·5 million. The provision allows for real growth in the executive's activities in all three years, including an increase in the number of inspectors, and of inspections. Details will be published shortly in the commission's plan of work for 1989-90 and beyond.

40. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many reviews and audits of the staffing and structure of the Health and Safety Executive have been carried out in the past two years.

Mr. Nicholls: Between March 1987 and April 1989 there were some 19 reviews which examined, among other things, questions of staffing and structure. These included 12 reviews of particular parts of the organisation conducted by the Executive's management review section; four other internal reviews; and three independent(externally led) reviews.

Staffing and other resources requirements for the executive are reviewed annually by the commission in preparation for the public expenditure planning round.

43. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many scientists have left the Health and Safety Executive in the last 12 months; and how many were retirements and how many were resignations.

Mr. Nicholls: Between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989, a total of 22 scientists left the Health and Safety Executive. Of these, a total of six retired, 12 resigned, three transferred to other Government Departments and one died.

58. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many additional staff the Health and Safety Executive required as a consequence of the passing of the lead regulations; and how many staff the executive estimated it would require at the initial drafting stage.

Mr. Nicholls: None in both cases. The enforcement of the regulations was expected to be, and has been, integrated into normal inspection arrangements.

66. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total staffing level of the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April 1975, 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 August 1975, the first date for which figures are available, 2,937 permanent staff were employed in the Health and Safety Executive. On 1 April 1979 and 1989, the totals were 4,170 and 3,449 respectively.

68. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff years were taken by the Health and Safety Executive's work on European Economic Community directives, legislation and initiatives in 1988; and how many are planned for 1989.

110. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff years were taken by the Health and Safety Executive's work on European Economic Community directives, legislation and initiatives in 1988; and how many are planned for 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive's plans for 1989-90 allocate some 188 staff years specifically to work of international (mainly EC) origin: on legislation and other policy projects, development of safety standards, and notifications and assessments of substances. Information is not available on a comparable basis for the previous year. The estimate excludes senior management time and a significant proportion of staff time on other HSE functions which derives directly or indirectly from EC initiatives.

71. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff were employed by the Health and Safety Executive's directorate of information and advice services in each of the last three years.

Mr. Nicholls: The numbers of staff employed in the Health and Safety Executive's directorate of information and advisory service at 1 April in each of the last three years were:

	Number
1986	106
1987	98·5
1988	101

At 1 April 1989, a total of 102·5 staff were employed.

77. **Mr. Denis Howell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many doctors left the Health and Safety Executive in the last 12 months; and how many of them were retirements and how many were resignations.

Mr. Nicholls: Between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989, a total of nine doctors left the Health and Safety Executive. Of these, four retired, four resigned and one transferred to another Government Department.

83. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how often in the last five years cuts in the Health and Safety Executive's travel and subsistence budget have resulted in inspectors being prevented from making inspections on a planned basis.

Mr. Nicholls: The allocation of expenditure between travel and subsistence and other items of running cost is a matter for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive. The commission has only once in the last five years (in 1987-88) sought additional running cost provision during the year. Ministers agreed to this in full.

87. **Mr. Buchan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many scientists were employed by the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April 1975, 1979 and 1989.

96. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many scientists were employed by the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April 1975, 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 August 1975, the earliest date for which figures are available, 259 scientists were employed in the Health and Safety Executive. On 1 April 1979 and 1989, the total were 355·5 and 300 respectively.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the targeted number of agricultural safety inspectors on 1 April 1975, 1979 and 1989 employed by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Nicholls: Her Majesty's agricultural inspectorate joined the Health and Safety Executive from the Ministry

of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during 1976-77, with the field force in place in HSE by 1 March 1977. On that date, there were 191 inspectors in post in HSE. On 1 April 1979 and 1989, the totals were 190 and 165 respectively.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what work the Health and Safety Executive's medical division is currently undertaking on Legionnaires' disease.

Mr. Nicholls: In addition to continuing its wide-ranging programme of activities on Legionnaire's disease, the Health and Safety Commission has asked the HSE to undertake a review of policy on this subject.

102. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the targeted number of factory inspectors on 1 April 1975, 1979 and 1989 employed by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 July 1975, the earliest date for which figures are available, 557 factory inspectors were employed in the Health and Safety Executive. On 1 April 1979 and 1989, the totals were 742·5 and 604 respectively.

112. **Mr. Jim Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the post of chief employment nursing adviser with the Health and Safety Executive will be filled.

Mr. Nicholls: This post has been advertised within the Health and Safety Executive and an appointment will be made as soon as a suitable candidate has been identified.

118. **Mr. Allan Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many requests for advice and publications were received by the Health and Safety Executive's directorate of information and advice services in each of the last three years.

Mr. Nicholls: The number of requests for advice and publications received in each of the last three years by the public inquiry points of the Health and Safety Executive's directorate of information and advisory services was:

	1986-87	*1987-88*	[1] *1988-89*
Telephone inquiries	53,461	54,116	67,000
Letters received	34,205	27,603	36,000
Prestel frame accesses	95,000	98,510	100,000
Free leaflets issued	3,898,147	4,150,941	5,200,000

[1] Provisional.

123. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many specialists have left the Health and Safety Executive in the last 12 months; and how many were retirements and how many were resignations.

Mr. Nicholls: Between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989, a total of 17 specialist inspectors left the Health and Safety Executive; of these, five retired, nine resigned, and three transferred to other Government Departments.

135. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many mines inspectors and quarries inspectors the Health and Safety Executive had in place on 1 April.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 April 1989 the Health and Safety Executive employed 58 mines inspectors and 11 quarries inspectors.

29. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the targeted number of specialist inspectors employed by the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April 1975, 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 July 1975, the earliest date for which figures are available, 198 specialist inspectors were employed in the Health and Safety Executive. On 1 April 1979 and 1989, the totals were 225 and 211 respectively.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 19 April 1989

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

South Africa (Sanctions)

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the issue of nuclear sanctions against South Africa will be on the agenda for the forthcoming Council of Ministers meeting in Granada, Spain, on 15 and 16 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: There was no discussion of nuclear sanctions against South Africa at Granada, although the possibility of South Africa's accession to the non-proliferation treaty was noted and EC Foreign Ministers agreed to keep it under review.

It remains our policy not to supply any materials or equipment to South Africa which would aid her nuclear programme. This policy is exercised through the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985.

Prisoner Repatriation Agreements

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report the progress made on concluding prisoner repatriation agreements with Egypt, Peru and Thailand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Details of our negotiations with Foreign Governments are confidential. However, the present position is as follows.

The agreement with Egypt was to have been signed in Cairo in December 1988. Unfortunately, this did not prove possible. Discussions continue.

The Peruvians proposed a revised draft text of a proposed agreement in July 1988. Further discussions will shortly take place with the Government of Peru.

A Thai delegation is expected in London in the next few months to discuss the outstanding points on the proposed agreement with Thailand.

British Citizens (Convictions)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out, for each of the last five years for which figures are available, the number of British citizens who are convicted of offences abroad and who have not received custodial sentences, giving the nature of the offences and the sentences passed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is unavailable. There is no requirement for us to be notified of non-custodial sentences enforced on British nationals by foreign courts.

Turkey (Detentions)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Turkey regarding the detention of Dr. Nihat Sargin and Mr. Haydon Kutlu; and what effect Turkey's continued detention of political prisoners has on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Turkey's application for admission to the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: The Turkish Government are well aware of our concern about such cases, and our expectation that they should respect and abide by the human rights conventions to which they are a party.

Turkey's application to join the EC has been referred to the Commission for its opinion. Once available, the Council of Ministers will consider it further, taking into account all relevant factors including Turkey's human rights record.

TRANSPORT

King's Cross Fire

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now authorise the reimbursement of the legal costs of the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority in relation to its representation at the King's Cross public inquiry.

Mr. Portillo: We see no reason to question Mr. Fennell's judgment, reached after careful consideration of representations from the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority, that it was not appropriate that it should receive an order for costs, notwithstanding his acknowledgement of the substantial contribution made to the proceedings by the authority.

"The Road User and the Law"

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses he has received to date to the White Paper, "The Road User and the Law".

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have had over 90 representations from hon. Members, interested organisations and members of the public. We welcome the enthusiastic public response that the White Paper has received.

M5 (Wellington Access)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the closure of the southern exit off the M5 motorway at junction 26 and its consequences for access to Wellington; why the closure is necessary; and what temporary signposting measures he is taking to assist southbound motorway traffic heading for Wellington.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The work involves the complete reconstruction of about one mile of the southbound carriageway including that length through the interchange abutting the southbound slip road, which has to be closed for reasons of practicality and safety. The work should be completed before the spring bank holiday.

Signs warning of the closure were installed at junctions 25 and 26 about four weeks before work started. The diversionary routes are well signed on the M5, A38 and A358 at strategic positions. These routes are little longer but may take more time depending on the level of traffic congestion in Taunton.

Representations have been received from the Wellington chamber of trade, a local manufacturer and a member of the public, concerning the alternative route through Taunton and its signing.

M1-M25 Junction

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 11 April to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, when he expects to conclude his consideration of what remedial action is required to ease the way for traffic leaving the M1 and joining the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We expect to make an announcement in early summer following completion of the current comprehensive review of the road programme.

M1 (Traffic Flow)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 11 April to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, what action he will be taking to reduce congestion during peak hours to restore traffic flows between junctions 9 and 10 of the M1.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are seeking to increase capacity, assist traffic flow and offer improved alternative roads.

Our current programme includes the provision of climbing lanes for use by slow moving heavy goods vehicles in both directions from junction 9. The northbound one will extend the whole length between junctions 9 and 10, creating an extra lane. The southbound one will extend 1·41 km. from junction 9. Work is planned for 1991-92.

The possibility of further improvement is being considered in the current review of the road programme.

Motorways (Traffic Flows)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the current hourly traffic flow standards for *(a)* two-lane motorways and *(b)* three-lane motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department uses "design reference flows" rather than traffic flow standards when designing motorways. These indicate only the starting point for detailed economic and operational assessment of options.

The Department's design reference flows for a dual three-lane motorway range from 50,000 to 79,000 vehicles per annual average day in the design year (15 years after the road opens). Comparable figures for a two-lane motorway are 28,000 to 54,000 vehicles per day.

The capacity of roads is substantially greater than design reference flows.

Road Building

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what Government financial assistance has been allocated to county road building and improvement programmes for 1988-89 and for 1989-90.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The 108 local highway authorities in England were given a total capital allocation of £567·111 million for capital expenditure in 1988-89 on road building and improvements. Of this £191 million was provided by way of transport supplementary grant towards the cost of schemes of more than local importance. The corresponding figures for 1989-90 are £513 million and £204 million respectively.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what Government financial assistance has been allocated to East Sussex's road building and improvement programme for 1988-89 and for 1989-90.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: East Sussex county council was given a capital allocation of £7·180 million for expenditure on road building and improvements in 1988-89. Of this £2·121 million was provided by way of transport supplementary grant towards the cost of schemes of more than local importance. The corresponding figures for 1989-90 are £6·720 million and £2·482 million respectively.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implications for transport safety of the decision to withdraw the services of watchmen from the Forth rail bridge.

Mr. Portillo: Whilst this is a management matter for British Rail, which considers that the decision does not endanger safety, I understand that watchmen's duties were to guard against risk of fire from steam trains and to deter trespassers when the only other means of crossing the Forth was by ferry.

Derbyshire (Traffic Problems)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up a departmental inquiry into traffic problems in Dronfield, Derbyshire.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: An A61 Trunk road bypass on Dronfield was opened in October 1975. Any traffic problems within Dronfield are a matter for the local highway authority, Derbyshire county council.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or one planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It would be extremely difficult to draw up a complete inventory of all the Department's publicity material (posters, leaflets, TV and radio "fillers", etc) which are likely to be issued or broadcast during the current quarter. Nor could all this material be properly dignified with the title of "campaign".

The Department produces a wide range of publicity material, particularly in the road safety field, which will be available throughout the period in question. Specific campaigns to be conducted during the first three months of 1989-90 are as follows:

—child seat belts ("Belt Up in The Back") from 24 April

—merchant navy reserve from 17 May

—drink/drive ("Drinking and Driving Wrecks Lives") from 12 June to mid July.

Only the drink-drive campaign involves television advertising.

We try, with limited success, to offer information constantly for news and current affairs coverage of the causes of road casualties.

Road Accidents

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he proposes to take to reduce the number of pedestrian accidents.

Mr. Channon: I have today announced a series of proposals in a document "Pedestrian Safety: Making Walking Safer". I am placing copies in the Library. The measures include:

1. A major pilot "Traffic Club" demonstration for pre-school children, funded by General Accident, and covering some half a million children.
2. Proposals to amend the road hump regulations so as to allow them to be used more widely, and to help and encourage local authorities with area wide traffic calming and urban safety schemes.
3. A campaign this autumn to encourage the greater use of reflective material on children's clothing.
4. Enlisting the help of the motoring organisations in improving driver awareness of pedestrian safety.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of General Accident's support for the Government's efforts to reduce road accidents and road casualties.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: General Accident has supported the Government's road safety efforts magnificently. Its initiatives since 1986 have included:

1986

a. National Children's Poster Competition—Winning efforts used as basis of 1988 General Accident calender.
b. Roadsafe Family of the Year Competition 1986.
c. "The Road's Story" Booklet.
d. 100 sets of interactive video equipment.
e. Interactive video programme—funded jointly with Department of Transport "Road Show".
f. Advertising Campaign—£750,000.
g. Support for the regions of United Kingdom not primarily covered by the Department of Transport—Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
h. Reflective conspicuity aids.
i. Gallup Polls—Driver behaviour (September)
Drink/Drive (December).
j. Road Safety Officer/Department of Transport/GA Regional Liaison Meetings.

1987

a. "The Road's Story" Booklet—revised edition—making 3·5 m in total.
b. Welsh edition of "The Road's Story".
c. 100 sets of interactive video equipment.
d. Interactive video programmes—funded jointly with the Department of Transport—"Roadsafe Family of the Year" and "The Bike Show".
e. Reflective conspicuity aids.
f. "Roadsafe Family of the Year" competition 1987.
g. Support for the regions of the United Kingdom not primarily covered by the Department of Transport—Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
h. Video in support of PACTS—Children wearing suitable restraints and seatbelts in rear of car.
i. 1988 General Accident Calendar.
j. Road Safety Officers Conference—Exeter.
k. Gallup Poll—Children/Parents Driver (August)
"Dumbos and Yobs" Drink/Drive (December).
l. "Are you prepared to be safe?" Leaflet giving advice for those going abroad on holiday.
m. Road Safety Officers/Department of Transport/GA Regional Liaison Meetings.

1988

a. "On the Motorway"—a new 'Road's Story' booklet.
b. "Roadsafe Family of the Year" competition 1988.
c. "Lorry Driver of the Year" competition 1988.
d. Police National Motorway Safety Campaign.
e. National Competition in support of Motorway Safety Campaign.
f. Police Summer Conference on Road Safety.
g. "Trouble Free Motoring"—a paperback by Roger MacDonald ex BBC.
h. 25 more sets of interactive video equipment.
i. Interactive video programmes funded jointly with Department of Transport—"The Collector" and "Streetsense".
j. Gallup Poll on Motorway Driving.
k. Support for regions of United Kingdom not specifically covered by Department of Transport—Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
l. Research Fellowships—£500,000 for six projects. These cover various aspects of road safety, including road crossing skills for children, and driver behaviour amongst women, the elderly, and young drivers.
m. "Positive Cycling" booklet—a joint initiative with the Department of Transport and CTC.
n. Road Safety Officers/Department of Transport/GA Regional Meetings.
o. Road Safety Officers Conference—Solihull
p. Exhibitions—International Motorshow, Welsh Show, Scottish Roadshow and London Road Safety Officers "Eurosafe" '87.
q. Launch of "FIRMS"—an insurance package designed to provide fleet operators with an incentive to include driver training as part of fleet management.

1989

a. "On the Road in GB" for visitors abroad.
b. "Highway Code for Young Road Users".
c. "Lorry Driver of the Year 1989"
d. Re-print "The Road's Story" and "On the Motorway.
e. 25 more sets of interactive video equipment—total now 250.
f. Interactive video programmes—jointly with Department of Transport. One based on "Highway Code for Young Road Users".
g. Road Safety Officers Conference—Reading.
h. Research Fellowships.
i. Support for regions of United Kingdom not specifically covered by Department of Transport—Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
j. Road Safety Officers/Department of Transport/GA Regional Liaison Meetings.
k. Gallup Poll—Pedestrians.
l. Pilot Traffic Club for pre-school children.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Publicity Campaigns

4. **Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department is not currently involved in any publicity campaigns. However, a teacher recruitment publicity campaign mounted by the teaching as a career unit has recently been completed. This included newspaper advertising but not television advertising. The campaign has attracted over 10,000 responses. There are no plans at present for any Departmental publicity campaigns in the first three months of the financial year 1989-90.

Under-Fives

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he proposes to reply to the report of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts entitled "Educational Provision for the Under Fives".

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have sent the Government's response to this report to the Chairman of the Committee today. A copy has been placed in the Library.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Land Registry (Security)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Attorney-General what steps are taken to ensure that the security arrangements at the land registry in Nottingham are sufficient to ensure that documents remain confidential and are not disposed of in public places; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: All the normal security arrangements to be found in government offices obtain for the Nottingham district land registry. Those arrangements at Nottingham, as at all district registries, remain under constant review to ensure that documents are in safe custody. A small number of papers stolen from the Nottingham district land registry have recently been recovered. An urgent, independent investigation is being conducted into the loss of these documents, and the circumstances of their recovery.

Commonhold

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to make a decision on implementation of the recommendation of the working group of the Law Commission on commonhold, Cm. 179; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor hopes to be in a position to announce a decision on the implementation of the Law Commission working group report on commonhold during the summer. Work is continuing at the Law Commission on the preparation of draft legislation to give effect to the report.

PRIME MINISTER

Hospitals (Norwich)

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Prime Minister if, in the last three years, she has met medical consultants concerning the location of the second district general hospital in the Norwich health district.

The Prime Minister: As the House is aware, my normal practice is and will continue to be neither to confirm nor to deny whether meetings with private individuals have taken place, even in those cases where no such meeting has occurred.

ENERGY

Efficiency Expenditure

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much will be spent by his Department in the next financial year in energy efficiency work; and what was the expenditure of his Department five and 10 years ago.

Mr. Parkinson: Expenditure by my Department on energy efficiency programmes was £2·4 million in 1979-80 and £17·5 million in 1984-85. The provision for expenditure by the energy efficiency office in 1989-90 is £15 million as published in the supply estimates.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Parkinson: As at 1 April 1989 there were no women in grades 1 to 4; three (7 per cent.) at grade 5; one (5 per cent.) at grade 6; and 18 (12·5 per cent.) at grade 7. Information on ethnic origin in these grades is not yet available.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: A survey was completed in 1986 and a further survey is planned later this year.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Parkinson: My Department, which is an equal opportunities employer, does not itself recruit to senior posts. The Civil Service Commission recruits to these positions, following equal opportunities procedures.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or campaigns planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Parkinson: There is a continuing programme of publicity to promote the work of the Department's energy

efficiency office, offshore supplies office and the use of renewable sources of energy. None of these campaigns will involve television advertising.

CIVIL SERVICE

Recruitment and Training

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he next plans to visit the Fylde coast area to discuss matters relating to Civil Service recruitment and training.

Mr. Luce: I have no plans to do so. However, I am pleased to note that, in terms of the north-western region as a whole, numbers of civil servants have been increasing in recent years, a period when overall numbers in the service and numbers in the south-east have declined. I am sure that the relative attractiveness of the region for departmental recruitment has been an important factor in this.

THE ARTS

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, respectively, and overall in his Office are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Luce: The number, and percentage, of women officers in grades 2, 5, 6, 7, and overall, in the Department, are given in the table. The Department does not employ anyone at grades 1, 3 and 4.

	Number of women in grade	*Percentage*
Grade 2	—	—
Grade 5	1	25
Grade 6	1	100
Grade 7 (and equivalent)	4	33
Departmental total	27	45

My information is that none of the staff of the Office of Arts and Libraries is a member of the ethnic minorities.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister for the Arts when his Office last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The last survey was conducted in 1986. There are no plans to repeat it, but the ethnic origins of all new entrants to the Office of Arts and Libraries are monitored on a continuous basis by the Cabinet Office.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Balance of Trade

84. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he now expects Britain's trade to be in balance.

88. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects the balance of trade to be positive.

89. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he now expects Britain's trade to be in balance.

91. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he now expects Britain's trade to be in balance.

Mr. Major: The Financial Statement and Budget Report for 1989-90 shows a forecast of a deficit in visible trade in 1989. Forecasts of the balance in later years are not published.

85. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the level of the parameters of inaccuracy for the balance of trade.

Mr. Major: The estimates for trade in goods are generally considered to be of fairly high quality. Figures for trade in services are subject to much wider margins of error.

There are considerable difficulties in measuring the United Kingdom's balance of payments account as a whole, and over the last three years, the "balancing item" has averaged £14 billion per year. The "balancing item" reflects errors and omissions in both the current and capital account.

Trade Deficit

86. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he now expects to be the trade deficit in 1989.

Mr. Major: The Financial and Budget Report for 1988-89 shows a forecast deficit for visible trade in 1989 of £21½ billion.

Manufacturing Trade Deficit

87. **Mr. Bell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the manufacturing trade deficit in 1989.

Mr. Major: The Financial Statement and Budget Report for 1989-90 shows a forecast deficit in manufactured trade in 1989 of £15½ billion.

90. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the deficit in trade in manufactures for 1990-91.

Mr. Major: The Financial Statement and Budget Report for 1989-90 provides a forecast of the manufactured trade balance for 1989 only. Forecasts of the balance in later years are not published.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring up to date the information in his reply dated 28 July 1988, *Official Report*, columns *497-98*, concerning the United Kingdom net contribution to the European Community budget; and if he will add forecasts for 1989, 1990 and 1991, drawing attention to any differences between these figures, and those used for the estimates in table 21.2.2 of Cm 21.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* The updated figures are set out in the table. An estimate of the

United Kingdom's net contribution in 1989 will be contained in the statement on the 1989 Community budget, to be published later in the month. It is not the Government's practice to publish calendar year forecasts for future years.

£ million

Year	Net contribution before refunds or VAT abatements (cash)	Negotiated-refunds	VAT abatements	Net contribution after refunds and abatements (cash)[1]	Net contribution after refunds and abatements at constant 1988 prices[2]
1975	−56	—	—	−56	−180
1976	167	—	—	167	467
1977	369	—	—	369	908
1978	822	—	—	822	1,813
1979	947	—	—	947	1,828
1980	804	98	—	706	1,138
1981	1,090	693	—	397	574
1982	1,625	1,019	—	606	815
1983	1,454	807	—	647	827
1984	1,184	528	—	656	802
1985	2,035	61	166	1,808	2,090
1986	2,273	—	1,701	572	639
1987	2,866	—	1,153	1,713	1,827
1988	2,956	—	1,594	1,362	1,362

[1] United Kingdom figures show payments to the Community budget on a cash flow basis. Budget refunds and abatements are credited to the year they are paid.
[2] Constant prices have been constructed using the GDP deflator at market prices.

Third World Debt

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on what percentage of the capital of British banks was represented by outstanding loans by major Third world borrowers in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The percentage of the capital of major British clearing banks with exposure to highly indebted Third world countries represented by outstanding loans to those countries in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	Figures
1984	179
1985	128
1986	103
1987	81
1988	65

The figures for exposure do not take account of the provisions made by the banks against their loans to these countries. Net of provisions the banks' exposure to these countries represented 44 per cent. of their capital in 1988 (56 per cent. in 1987).

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Brooke: The information is as follows:

	Women		Ethnic minorities[1]	
	Number	Percentage of staff in grade	Ethnic Number[2]	Percentage of staff in grade
Grade 1	0	0	0	0
Grade 1a	1	25	0	0
Grade 2	0	0	0	0
Grade 3	3	13	0	0
Grade 4	0	0	0	0
Grade 5	9	13	0	0
Grade 6	0	0	[3]	3·5
Grade 7	43	16	0	0
Total for Department[3]	1,241	39	115	[4]4·8

[1] Information on ethnic origins was provided on a voluntary basis.
[2] In accordance with the Department's Code of Practice governing the use of ethnic data, figures for ethnic minorities have been rounded to the nearest 5 to preserve confidentiality; the [2] denotes less than 3. The percentages have been calculated on the basis of unrounded data.
[3] Equivalent information on ethnic origins of industrial staff is not available.
[4] Because of [3] above, the percentage quoted is based on the figure for non-industrial staff only.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My department conducted an ethnic survey of all its non-industrial staff during 1986; updating and monitoring information on the ethnic origins of our staff is a continuous process.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Brooke: The Civil Service Commission is responsible for recruitment to the top grades in my Department.

Internal Market

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total value to the latest available full year of public sector contracts in England of a character which will make them open to Community-wide bidding as part of the creation of the internal market.

Mr. Brooke: None. The cost of assessing the value of public contracts in England to be opened to Community-

wide bidding would not be justified. The European Commission is currently investigating the effect of applying procurement rules to contracts above various value thresholds in sectors excluded from the existing Community directives.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pollution

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms in England were advised by agricultural development advisory service staff about methods of controlling agricultural pollution in each of the last five years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: This information is not available in the form requested.

Grain Stores

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many grain stores the intervention board owns and manages on his behalf; if he will publish in the *Official Report* the location, size in square feet or volume, the capacity and the approximate value of each; how and by whom each of these stores is managed; how and by whom the managers are recruited and appointed and how much they are paid; and which of the stores has returned a profit or a loss and of what order, in each of the financial years 1980 to 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The intervention board does not own any intervention grain stores but rents eight Government-owned properties from the Property Services Agency estates. Details of the locations, volumes, capacities, values and managing companies are given in the table. Managing companies are contracted by the intervention board after selection by competitive tender. Information on amounts paid to individual companies is commercially confidential. The stores are used exclusively to store intervention grain or oilseeds and the intervention board derives no income from their use other than the European Community's contributions at standard rates towards handling and storage costs. In terms of the cost per tonne of grain or oilseeds handled and stored, they are fully competitive with the commercial stores contracted for intervention storage.

Location and managers	*Storage area ('000 sq. ft.)*	*Capacity (tonnes wheat equivalent)*	*Value*[1] *(£'000)*
1 Driffield (North Humberside)			
Fishers Seeds and Grain Ltd.	180	74,000	650
2 Hartlebury (Hereford and Worcester)			
Anglia Agricultural Merchants Ltd.	214	67,000	900
3 Hemswell (Lincolnshire)			
William Gleadell and Sons Ltd.	180	75,000	800
4 Locharbriggs (Dumfries)			
Storage Services (Leith) Ltd.	135	71,000	960
5 Manby (Lincolnshire)			
Wilsons Corn and Milling Ltd.	155	53,000	800
6 Prees Heath (Shropshire)			
Wilsons of Hadleigh	144	59,000	600
7 Tangmere (Sussex)			
John Bryant (Romsey) Ltd.	86	29,000	1,320
8 Yorkshire (Yorkshire)			
Fishers Seeds and Grain Ltd.	230	78,000	2,750

[1]As advised in 1988 by the Inland Revenue district valuers with the intervention board as sitting tenants.

MV Perintis

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what information he based his opinion recorded in the preamble to the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Sea Fish) (Revocation) Order 1989, S.I., 1988, No. 619, that the toxic substances which escaped as a result of the sinking of the MV Perintis were not in the area designated in the schedule to the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Sea Fish) Order, S.I., 1989, No. 529.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The precautionary ban on fishing was lifted after the French navy had completed an intensive search of the sea-bed in the area concerned. I understand their search operation extended over two weeks and involved a number of specially equipped surface ships and submersibles at a cost of over 8 million French francs but they were unable to find the lindane container in the area where they previously suspected it had sunk. In addition, the results of fish and water sampling which we and the French authorities were carrying out revealed no evidence of lindane leakage in this area.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate the types and approximate number of fishing vessels registered in the United Kingdom and other countries, which have been, or are likely to be, affected by the precautionary fishing ban, invoked by the Minister, under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 following the foundering of the vessel Perintis on 13 March.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The precautionary fishing ban, which applied to United Kingdom and Channel Islands vessels between 21 March and 7 April, covered an area of sea lying within a radius of seven nautical miles, centred on the position where the container of lindane was presumed to have sunk.

For part of the period the area was unsuitable for fishing because of poor weather and tidal conditions.

The area is used for potting by six vessels from Alderney. No English or other Channel Island vessels are understood to take significant catches from the area.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate the methods of

monitoring instituted by his Ministry, following the loss of the MV Perintis in the Channel on or about 13 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Immediately following the sinking of the MV Perintis, my Ministry undertook a programme of monitoring of water and biological material (fish and crabs) from around the wreck of the vessel and from the area in which the container of lindane was presumed to have sunk. This programme has since been extended to include fish landed at south coast ports. The results of the monitoring indicate that there has been no leakage of the permethrin, cypermethrin or lindane being carried by the vessel.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations are taking place regarding the retrieval of the container containing five tonnes of organochlorine insecticide, lindane, which was lost when the vessel Perintis foundered north-west of Guernsey on or about 13 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My officials have kept in close touch with the Department of Transport, the Home Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department of Health and the Department of the Environment in connection with the search by the French authorities for the container of lindane lost from the MV Perintis on 13 March. Contacts were maintained with the French authorities both directly and through the Department of Transport, which has lead responsibility for marine pollution control operations. Officials from my Department participated in a meeting with French and Channel Island experts on 4 April to review the degree of threat to the marine environment posed by this container of lindane.

Piper Alpha Platform

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the role performed by his Department in the monitoring of the area above and on the seabed surrounding the wreckage of Piper Alpha; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Monitoring in the area concerned is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Beef Special Premium

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to switch the beef special premium from its present administration to on-farm administration.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The beef special premium scheme has been in operation for just over two weeks. I have no plans to change its administration in Great Britain at present. However, as my right hon. Friend announced on 6 March we shall be reviewing the operation of the scheme with my colleagues in other Departments to assess the practicability and cost-effectiveness of moving to an on-farm operation in due course.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why he established the beef special premium as an off-farm administration.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We have had only a very short time in which to make arrangements for the operation of the beef special premium scheme in Great Britain. As my right hon. Friend announced on 6 March, we concluded that in the first instance it was desirable to build on the arrangements then in place for the operation of the beef variable premium scheme and thus to operate the scheme at live markets and abattoirs. This method of operation has the further advantage of enabling producers to apply for premium under the new scheme in much the same way and at the same marketing stage as they like to apply for beef variable premium. In practice, the transition to the new arrangements has been effective relatively smoothly, largely in consequence of this decision.

Fishing Vessels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that those British owners of fishing vessels who have not yet been issued with full or temporary certificates despite submission of bona fide applications are not in any way disadvantaged in terms of access to fishing quotas and grounds.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I understand that the Department of Transport has now issued full or temporary certificates to all applicants fulfilling the necessary requirements. Fishing entitlements for such vessels have not been affected by the introduction of the new registration arrangements.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The current publicity campaigns being conducted by my Department and planned for the first three months of 1989-90 are as follows:

On-going campaigns:

- Imports
- Rabies
- Food
  - additives
  - labelling
  - surveillance
- Farm and conservation grants scheme
- Recruitment
- Farm woodlands
- Environmentally sensitive areas
- Diversification

Planned campaigns:

- Plant health—May 1989 to October 1989
- Colorado beetle—May 1989 to June 1989
- Food nutrition—April 1989 ongoing
- Food safety (joint with Department of Health)—May 1989 ongoing.

No campaigns use paid TV advertising.

Potatoes

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will announce his conclusions following the review of potato market policy.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friends and I have considered the many replies to the consultation document.

I have also just completed meetings with various producer and processor interests. We now need time to reflect on the conclusions to be drawn from this exercise. I do not at present envisage an announcement before the end of May.

SCOTLAND

Tweed Towards 2000 Symposium

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what is the estimated total cost related to participation by civil servants at the Tweed Towards 2000 symposium to be held in May; and if any charge is being made by his Department to the organisers of the symposium for this service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Five scientists from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland laboratories at Aberdeen and Pitlochry were invited to participate in the symposium on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 May 1989 by the organisers, the Tweed Foundation. The scientists will be attending in their own time with their travelling and accommodation costs being met by the Tweed Foundation. A charge by the Scottish Office for their services would not be appropriate in the circumstances.

Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if L-Threonine is available on the National Health Service for the treatment of motor neurone disease;

(2) how many people in Scotland suffer from motor neurone disease.

(3) if he will list the drugs available on the National Health Service for sufferers from motor neurone disease in Scotland;

(4) what representations he has received about the availability of L-Threonine.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the NHS, general medical practitioners have freedom to prescribe whatever drugs they consider to be clinically necessary for the treatment of their patients, except items which are excluded under the selected list scheme. Foods and food supplements are not normally prescribable and L-Threonine is more properly classed as a food supplement than as a drug. Doctors can, however, prescribe food supplements where they are, in their clinical judgment, necessary for the treatment of patients but may be asked to justify their prescribing by their area medical committee. Exact information on the numbers of people in Scotland suffering from motor neurone disease is not centrally available. There are no drugs which are specifically recommended for the treatment of motor neurone disease. Representations have been received from the hon. Members for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) and for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and from two general medical practitioners.

Community Charge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why the decision not to allow the sale of the extract of the community charge register was taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The decision was taken after careful consideration of representations made by the Data Protection Registrar and others that the sale of the publicly available community charges register was not an essential part of the community charge system and that there would be a potential threat to privacy if extracts were made too readily available to interests who might wish to use them as mailing lists.

Police Rent Allowance

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consult local authorities about the possibility of introducing a temporary flat rate allowance for officers in provided accommodation in Scotland to take account of their requirement to pay the community charge and pending the final outcome of the rent allowance arbitration.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. This matter was considered at a meeting of the police negotiating board on 17 April when the staff side's proposal for an interim housing allowance payable to officers in provided accommodation was rejected by the official side.

However negotiations between the two sides on long-term arrangements proposed by the Police Arbitration Tribunal are continuing.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what representations he has received from police authorities in Scotland concerning the desirability of interim financial arrangements being introduced to ensure that no police officer is worse off as a result of the introduction of the community charge pending the final outcome of the recent rent allowance arbitration; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider the difficulties facing new recruits to the police forces in Scotland due to the uncertainty surrounding the financial recompense for the community charge pending the final outcome of the rent allowance arbitration; and if he will take urgent action in conjunction with the local authorities to introduce interim arrangements as suggested by the arbitrators, subject to subsequent adjustment following the Government's decision on the recommended implementation of the new housing allowance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations from police authorities about this issue. In response it was made clear that the question of interim arrangements was a matter for the police negotiating board. The question was considered at a meeting of the board on 17 April when, with the position of my right hon. and learned Friend being reserved, the official side agreed the staff side's proposal that all officers in Scottish forces in receipt of rent allowance on 31 March 1989 should continue to receive the levels payable at that date pending the introduction of a new housing allowance recommended by the Police Arbitration Tribunal. There are no grounds for interim arrangements for officers entering the service after 31 March 1989.

The tribunal accepted the official side's case that the community charge payable by police officers should not be reimbursed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Assistance

5. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many projects have been supported by regional assistance over the past year.

Mr. Newton: My Department expects to have supported in excess of 7,500 projects through regional assistance during 1988-89. Specifically, the Department has made 1,275 offers of regional selective assistance and 920 offers of regional enterprise grant, approved 5,380 projects under the revised regional development grant scheme and made payments under the original regional development grant scheme in respect of some 270 projects. All these figures are provisional.

Inner-City Task Forces

11. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many projects have been supported by his inner-city task forces.

Mr. Newton: Since the task forces began their work in 1986 over 1,200 projects have been approved and over £38 million has been committed. These projects are projected to secure over 4,000 jobs, facilitate over 23,500 training places and provide support for over 2,600 businesses.

29. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the leaders of the inner-city task forces; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) on 15 March 1989 at column *256*.

European Regional Development Fund

16. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the distribution of European regional development fund moneys within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: Since the inception of the European regional development fund in 1975, the United Kingdom has received commitments valued at £3,307 million. Commitments for England have been £1,602 million, for Scotland £792 million, Wales £491 million and Northern Ireland £343 million. The remaining £79 million has been committed on a multi-regional basis. The future distribution will depend on decisions by the Commission, and may fluctuate from year to year.

Internal Market

18. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent estimates his Department has made of the effects of 1992 on Britain's regions.

Mr. Maude: None. It is for individual businesses, wherever they are, to assess for themselves what the effects of the single market will be for them. My Department provides a comprehensive information service to enable them to do so.

Mergers and Acquisitions

21. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the percentage increase in expenditure on mergers and acquisitions since 1979.

Mr. Maude: Expenditure on acquisitions and mergers by industrial and commercial companies within the United Kingdom in 1988 is estimated to be about £22 billion. In current prices this is about 13 times greater than the 1979 total of about £1¾ billion.

42. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the percentage increase in expenditure on mergers and acquisitions since 1979.

Mr. Maude: Expenditure on acquisitions and mergers by industrial and commercial companies within the United Kingdom in 1988 is estimated to be about £22 billion. In current prices this is about 13 times greater than the 1979 total of about £1¾ billion.

Consumer Advice Centres

22. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has for strengthening the national network of consumer advice centres.

56. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has for strengthening the national network of consumer advice centres.

74. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has for strengthening the national network of consumer advice centres.

Mr. Forth: I have no such proposals. Funding of consumer advice centres is a matter for the local decision and local funding. The Government do fund the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, and Citizens Advice Scotland which provide central support services for local bureaux. In recent years the grant to these bodies has risen substantially in real terms. In 1980 the local bureaux took over a considerable proportion of the work of consumer advice centres.

36. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met representatives from local authority consumer advice centres; and what matters were discussed.

58. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met representatives from local authority consumer advice centres; and what matters were discussed.

76. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To askton the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met representatives from local authority consumer advice centres; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Forth: I have had no such meeting and none has been requested.

Information Technology

24. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects Britain to have a trade surplus in information technology.

26. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects Britain to have a trade surplus in information technology.

Mr. Newton: It is not possible to make a prediction of the kind that the hon. Member seeks. What is important is that this Government's economic policies have led to record levels of productivity, output and investment and have helped to attract companies such as Fujitsu which will provide a major boost to our balance of trade in imformation technology, through both exports and import substitution.

37. **Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on his response to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry's report into information technology.

62. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on his response to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry's report into information technology.

Mr. Newton: We have received no formal representations on this response.

39. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement of the Government's policy for information technology.

Mr. Newton: The Government's response to the Trade and Industry Select Committee's report on information technology published on 9 March as Cm 646 contains a comprehensive statement of the Government's policy towards information technology.

65. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the balance of trade in information technology in 1979 and 1988.

Mr. Newton: For the information technology and electronics manufacturing sector the United Kingdom had an adverse balance of trade in 1979 of £444 million. In 1987, the latest full year for which figures are available, the adverse balance for this sector was £2,226 million.

80. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the balance of trade in information technology in 1979 and 1988.

Mr. Newton: For the information technology and electronics manufacturing sector the United Kingdom had an adverse balance of trade in 1979 of £444 million. In 1987, the latest full year for which figures are available, the adverse balance for this sector was £2,226 million.

Company Liquidity

25. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his latest estimate of company liquidity; and when it was last lower.

Mr. Maude: The liquidity ratio for all large industrial and commercial companies is estimated by the Department's survey to be 76 per cent. at the end of the fourth quarter of 1988 on a seasonally adjusted basis. This is the lowest figure since the end of the third quarter of 1982.

Manufacturing Productivity

27. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster by what proportion manufacturing productivity has increased since 1980.

Mr. Maude: In the three months to February 1989 manufacturing productivity, as measured by output per person employed, was 55 per cent. higher than the 1980 average level.

Footwear Industry

28. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received regarding the British footwear industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: Since I replied to a similar question from the hon. Member on 15 February at column *305* of the *Official Report* for 16 February a number of hon. Members have made known to me the concerns of their constituents.

I am taking a close interest in this matter and in the outcome of the Commission's investigation into imports of footwear from Taiwan and South Korea.

Borrowers (Advice)

30. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the range of advice available to borrowers and potential borrowers on alternative forms of credit, especially in the inner cities.

Mr. Maude: The Office of Fair Trading has a statutory duty under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 to inform the public about credit. It gives advice through the media, and booklets, posters and videos which are freely available through citizens advice bureaux, trading standards departments and public libraries. In addition the banks provide a banking information service. In the inner-city areas certain local authorities have set up money advice services; and some 20 financial organisations are providing £750,000 over a period of three years for money advice and debt counselling services.

Civil Research and Development

31. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in which Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries the proportion of gross domestic product spent by Government on civil research and development has fallen since 1983.

66. **Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reduced the share of gross domestic product spent on civil research and development between 1983 and 1986; and which countries increased it.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) on 15 March at column *265*.

48. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reduced the share of gross domestic product spent on civil research and development between 1983 and 1986; and which countries increased it.

54. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reduced the share of gross domestic product spent on civil research and development between 1983 and 1986; and which countries increased it.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Pike) on 14 February at columns *256* and *257* of the *Official Report* for 15 February.

Communications Infrastructure (Report)

32. **Mr. Allan Roberts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the Macdonald report on communications infrastructure.

41. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the Macdonald report on communications infrastructure.

77 **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the Macdonald report on communication infrastructure.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) on 15 March at column *266*.

Directors (Disbarral)

33. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many times in the last 10 years he has exercised his power to disbar directors of public companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The Secretary of State may apply to the court to disqualify directors under various provisions now consolidated in the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986.

Between 1 April 1979 and 28 April 1986, when the current provisions came into force, 111 applications were made. Since 28 April 1986 the number of applications has been:

	Number
1986	22
1987	180
1988	421
[1]1989	99

[1] To 31 March.

Such applications relate both to public and private companies.

The Act also empowers the courts to disqualify directors in certain criminal proceedings and where the Secretary of State brings such prosecutions it is his practice to draw the court's attention to these powers.

Industrial Investment

34. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the latest indications he has for the growth in industrial investment over the past year.

Mr. Maude: The volume of investment by the manufacturing, construction, distribution and financial industries in 1988 was nearly 11 per cent. higher than in 1987.

Competitiveness

35. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from industry on matters affecting competitiveness.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from industry on matters affecting competitiveness.

Mr. Maude: Frequent, numerous and diverse.

61. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from industry on matters affecting competitiveness.

Mr. Maude: Most contacts which my Department has with industry and commerce involve matters having a bearing on United Kingdom competitiveness.

EC (Trade Barriers)

38. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action he is taking to ensure that the European Community does not erect protectionist trade barriers.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to him on 16 February at column *248*.

Single Market

40. **Mr. Curry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the latest indications he has of awareness in the business community about opportunities presented by the completion of the single market in 1992.

Mr. Maude: Our surveys indicate that over 90 per cent. of firms throughout the country are aware of the single market challenge.

78. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the achievements of his 1992 campaign.

Mr. Maude: Since the campaign was launched on 18 March 1988, the DTI has handled over 205,000 requests for further information. Our surveys indicate that over 90 per cent. of firms throughout the country are aware of the single market challenge and that around 50 per cent. of British business is taking action or considering steps to prepare for the single market.

81. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many calls have been received to date by his Department's 1992 hotline.

Mr. Maude: Our 1992 hotline has received over 123,000 calls since it opened on 18 March 1988.

Midland Bank

43. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received over the activities of the Midland bank in *(a)* the distribution of unsolicited auto-cheque cards and *(b)* other banking issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I am not aware of any representations about unsolicited auto-cheque cards or other banking issues relating to Midland bank. I understand that as certain service cards are renewed some have been incorporated into a multi-purpose card but I am not aware that this has caused any difficulties.

Boeing 747 Aircraft

44. **Mr. Bright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the Boeing 747 series of aircraft is manufactured by the British aerospace industry.

Mr. Forth: A number of United Kingdom aerospace companies participate in the Boeing 747 programme but the United Kingdom share is largely dependent upon the choice of engine. If a Rolls-Royce engine is selected, as is increasingly the case, the United Kingdom share of the initial sale value of the aircraft is 25 per cent., rising to 30 per cent. of its lifetime value once engine spares have been provided.

Consumer Rights

45. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he now has plans to bring forward legislation affecting consumer rights.

Mr. Forth: We intend to improve the protection given to consumers in a number of ways, including the introduction of regulations under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 on price indications at bureaux de change and changes to other legislation affecting consumers' interests.

Business in the Community

46. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met representatives of Business in the Community; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Newton: I last met representatives of Business in the Community at its president's committee meeting on 7 March 1989. The committee discussed how companies can contribute to community regeneration through their mainstream business activities, and what action companies can take to improve opportunities on housing estates.

Airbus Industrie

47. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made by Industry Ministers in the restructuring of Airbus Industrie.

Mr. Atkins: A new management structure for Airbus Industrie, broadly based on the recommendations contained in the 1988 report of the Airbus "wise men", was introduced with effect from 1 April 1989. The new structure is intended to strengthen the strategic control of Airbus projects by the four partners in the consortium while, at the same time, placing the senior managers of Airbus Industrie at the centre of all day-to-day operations of particular Airbus programmes.

Export Science System

49. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to extend the export licence system to cover material capable of being used for torture.

Mr. Alan Clark: Licences are required for export to all destinations of military, para-military, police and security equipment which is subject to control under the Export of Goods (Control) Order, 1987, (SI 1987, No. 2070) as amended. It is not our normal practice to grant a licence for the export of equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression.

It is impractical to seek to control materials capable of being used for torture, since almost any material could be put to such use.

Manufacturing Productivity

50. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in which position Britain lies in an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development league table for manufacturing productivity.

Mr. Maude: No reliable comparisons exist for absolute levels of manufacturing productivity between different countries. But available figures do show that in the eighties the United Kingdom has had the fastest rate of growth of manufacturing productivity of all the major industrialised countries.

Overseas Companies

51. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many overseas companies set up operations in Britain in 1988.

Mr. Newton: According to the latest figures known to the Invest in Britain Bureau, during the first three quarters of 1988, 271 inward investment decisions were made to locate in the United Kingdom. These include the establishment of a new business, expansion or acquisition of an existing business and involvement in joint venture.

Council of Consumer Ministers

52. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what matters he intends to discuss with his European Economic Community counterparts at the next meeting of the Council of Consumer Ministers.

69. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what matters he intends to discuss with his European Economic Community counterparts at the next meeting of the Council of Consumer Ministers.

73. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what matters he intends to discuss with his European Economic Community counterparts at the next meeting of the Council of Consumer Ministers.

Mr. Forth: I plan to represent the United Kingdom at the next meeting of the Council of Consumer Ministers which the Spanish presidency has provisionally scheduled for 1 June. The presidency has yet to finalise the agenda for the Council.

Regional Grant and Assistance

53. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the planned and estimated outturn expenditures on regional development grant and regional selective assistance for the year 1988-89.

Mr. Forth: The estimated 1988-89 outturn expenditure for regional development grant in England is £161·3 million, against supply estimate provision of £158·9 million. The equivalent figures for regional selective assistance are £136·1 million and £164·3 million. All figures are gross of domestic and European Community receipts. The RDG figures cover expenditure under the original and revised schemes. Those for RSA cover industrial and training grants, as well as expenditure under the business improvement services and exchange risk guarantee schemes.

House of Fraser

55. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the question of publication of his inspectors' report into the acquisition of the House of Fraser.

68. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the matter of publication of his inspectors' report into the acquisition of the House of Fraser.

Mr. Maude: I and my colleagues have received a number of representations.

Civil Aerospace Programmes (Aid)

57. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much launch aid for civil aerospace programmes was provided by his Department in 1988; and how much has been committed for 1989.

Mr. Atkins: For the calendar year 1988, £63 million was provided to British Aerospace in connection with the development of the Airbus A330/A340 programme and £10·3 million to Westland Helicopters in connection with the EH101. For the financial year 1988-89 the total figures were respectively £88·5 million and £9·9 million. For the financial year 1989-90 up to £154 million will be available to BAe and £12 million to Westland. The A330/340 and the EH101 are the only programmes currently receiving launch aid from the Department.

Licensed Credit Brokers (Advertising)

59. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he proposes to take to monitor the growth of advertising of loan facilities offered by licensed credit brokers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Responsibility for monitoring the day-to-day operation of the Consumer Credit Act and of the activities of licensed credit businesses are matters for local authority trading standards departments and the Office of Fair Trading. In relation to credit advertisements, I intend shortly to make new regulations under the Act governing advertisements, and my Department circulated proposals in a consultation letter dated 5 April 1989.

EC Commissioner for Consumer Affairs

60. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the European Commissioner for Consumer Affairs; and what matters were discussed.

70. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the European Commissioner for Consumer Affairs; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Forth: I met Commissioner Van Miert during his visit to London on 2 February, shortly after his appointment. The Commissioner took the opportunity to mention in general terms his views on the future direction of EC consumer policy.

Interest Rates

63. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further representations he has received on the effects of current interest rates on industry.

Mr. Maude: I have received a number of further representations about the effects of interest rates on cash flow and investment in industry. Representations continue to give overwhelming support for firm action to control inflation and investment intentions remain strong.

Company Mergers

64. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment his Department has made of company mergers and the effect on employee rights.

Mr. Maude: Normal employee rights continue when a company is taken over.

Inward Investment

67. **Mr. Forman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his Department's latest indication of the value of inward investment into Britain in 1988.

Mr. Newton: Inward investment into the United Kingdom in 1988 was £11·2 billion of which £7·1 billion was direct investment and £4·1 billion was portfolio investment.

Seals (Exports)

71. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further steps he plans to take to encourage exports from companies that manufacture seals.

Mr. Maude: Comprehensive support measures are already available through the DTI export initiative to assist companies who wish to export their products.

Regional Development

72. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he plans to announce any new initiatives to benefit Britain's regions.

Mr. Newton: Major changes in the focus of DTI's policies were made only last year. Regional policy now operates within a framework designed to encourage enterprise and economic growth in all parts of the country but with extra help available for firms in the regions.

Yorkshire and Humberside Confederation of British Industry

75. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Yorkshire and Humberside Confederation of British Industry to discuss industrial trends in that region.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans for such a meeting at present.

79. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he plans to announce any new initiatives to benefit Britain's regions.

Mr. Newton Major changes in the focus of DTI's policies were made only last year. Regional policy now operates within a framework designed to encourage enterprise and economic growth in all parts of the country but with extra help available for firms in the regions.

Ford Motor Company

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for

Warrington, North of 12 April, *Official Report*, column *545*, if he will make it his policy that in the next discussion between his Department and Ford about that company's manufacturing strategy, Ministers or officials will seek to encourage Ford to publish its own estimate of the net effect on the United Kingdom balance of payments of the transfer of the manufacture of Sierras.

Mr. Maude The transfer of Sierra manufacture from Dagenham to Genk is only one element in Ford's reorganisation which also includes expansion of Fiesta manufacture at Dagenham, of Escort manufacture at Halewood and Transit van manufacture at Southampton. The overall effect of these changes on the balance of payments is dependent on so many variables as to be impossible to estimate with any accuracy and I see no value in encouraging Ford to attempt to make such an estimate.

Bophuthatswana

Mr. Speller: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what trade is carried on between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Bophuthatswana; and what outward trade missions there have been.

Mr. Alan Clark Since Her Majesty's Government do not recognise the independent status of Bophuthatswana, UK trade statistics do not disaggregate trade figures for it or other regions within South Africa.

UK trade missions to South Africa may have visited Bophuthatswana but I am not aware of their precise itinerary.

Deregulation

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the current membership of the advisory panel on deregulation; and when he will be appointing new members.

Mr. Maude: Four new members have been appointed and will join the panel on 24 April 1989. They are:

Professor Sue Birley—Philip and Pauline Harris Professor of Entrepreneurship, Cranfield School of Management, Bedford.

Mr. John Lawrence—Chief Executive, Thorn Security Ltd., Feltham.

Mr. Brian Prime—Proprietor, Northbay House Residential Care Home, Lowestoft.

Mr. Brian Wicks—Deputy Director General, National Farmers Union, London.

The advisory panel makes an important contribution to the enterprise and deregulation unit's work by advising them on the impact of regulatory requirements on business and enterprise development. I should like to express my gratitude to them and particularly to the four retiring members, Mr. Colin Dauris, Mr. George Gray, Mr. Damon de Laszlo and Mr. Phillip White.

These new appointments will help to ensure the panel's continuing effectiveness as a source of valuable advice.

The existing membership of the advisory panel on deregulation is as follows:

Sir Nigel Mobbs DL, Chairman—Chairman and Chief Executive, Slough Estates plc, Slough.

Mr. Mike Fisher—Managing Director, Whale Tankers Ltd., Solihull, West Midlands.

Mrs. Teresa Graham—Senior Manager, Price Waterhouse, Newcastle.

Mr. Neil McArthur—Chairman, Thurnall Engineering Ltd., Manchester.

Mr. Stephen Moss—Managing Director, BCP Parking, and Director, Grosvenor Securities Ltd., London.

Mr. Tom O'Connor—Chairman and Managing Director, Elta Plastics, Stockton-on-Tees.

Mrs. Jenifer Rosenberg—Managing Director J and J Fashions Ltd., London.

Mrs. Celia Urquhart—Managing Director, CU Data Ltd., Glasgow.

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will now publish the report produced by the consultants Touche Ross on the National Engineering Laboratory, East Kilbride.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* The report has only just been received. No decision about publication has yet been taken.

Harrods (Report)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he now has any plans to meet the serious fraud office to discuss the publication of his Department's inspectors' report into the sale of Harrods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I have nothing to add to the statement made on 3 April by my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in another place and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy's reply to a Private Notice Question by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on 4 April (*Official Report*, cols. 19-20).

British Shipbuilders

Mr. Mans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether any further progress has been made on the disposal of the subsidiaries of British Shipbuilders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Pursuant to my answer to the hon. Member of 16 March at column *282*, I am pleased to report that William Steward and Company, Ltd. has now acquired British Shipbuilders' pipe work and electrical contracting subsidiary Sunderland Forge Services Ltd. This will become the centre for the Steward group's expansion into building services contracting in the north-east. The whole of William Steward's subsidiary, Durham Switch Gear Ltd., will shortly be moving its switch gear manufacturing activities, together with 135 employees, from nearby Washington into the factory previously owned by Sunderland Forge Services. William Steward's has in addition taken on nearly 200 of the previous 254 employees of Sunderland Forge Services and believes there is a good prospect of more jobs to come.

On 16 March I also told the House of my agreement to the disposal of British Shipbuilders Training Ltd. at Govan to a management team. This sale has now also been successfully completed, thereby maintaining an important training resource in Govan and south of the Clyde providing employment for 28 people in the area of training and management consultancy.

Finally, I can report that British Shipbuilders has now received a number of new bids for its design and computing subsidiary, Marine Design Consultants Ltd., based at Sunderland and Dundee. As with the new bids

that have been received for Ferguson Shipbuilders Ltd., these are now being assessed by the corporation and its advisers.

WALES

"Roads in Wales"

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to begin improvements to meet traffic requirements between Woodbank junction and Shotwick, as referred to in his Department's publication, "Roads in Wales" 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The section of trunk road between Woodbank and Shotwick is to be improved as an extension of the Department of Transport scheme for improvement between Woodbank and Ledsham, a start of works on which is envisaged in the financial year 1993-94 subject to satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and the availability of funds. Work in Wales will also be subject to the findings of a study that I am commissioning to determine the need and timing of improvements to the trunk road network in north east Clwyd.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the extra resources he intends to make available to the valley councils concerning trunk road maintenance and local authority highways maintenance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Allocations for trunk road maintenance are made annually on a county area basis. Allocations for 1989-90 will be announced shortly. Provision for county councils for maintenance of their roads in 1989-90 formed part of rate support grant settlement. Grant is allocated according to need on the basis of arrangements agreed by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or one planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Peter Walker: The current publicity campaigns being conducted by the Welsh Office or are planned for the first three months of 1989-90 are as follows:

	Duration of campaign
General	
Celebration of British food and farming	4-9 May
National curriculum and its implementation	On-running through year
Education Reform bill	On-running through year
School governors' guide to the law	May/June
Careers services in Wales	No date decided
Community charge	8-31 May
WOAD/ADAS publicity for: Research and development; ADAS divisional funds; ESA open days; Welsh outlook conference for farmers; Trawsgoed open day	On-running through year
ESA parliamentary report	June/July
Road safety drink/drive	Awaiting decision from Department of Transport
Child rear seat belt restraints	May/June
Child pedestrians and cyclists	May/June
Priority estates project final report	September
Tenants choice	Awaiting decision from Department of Health
TASC publicity	May/October
Various housing publications covering compulsory purchase, public development, business development, farming, traffic noise and road developments	No date decided
History of education in Wales centenary document	October/November
A55 publicity	On-running through year
StreetSense	April
Industry	
Various initiatives planned in conjunction with Department of Transport covering exports, grants, marketing etc.	On-running through year
Programme for the valleys—printed publicity material	May/June
Health	
Anti-smoking campaign	October/November
Keep well keep warm	November 1989/ February 1990
Donor cards	On-running through year
Breast cancer screening	On-running through year
Hospital complaints procedure	October/December
Mental illness strategy report	February/March 1990
Nursing recruitment literature from Department of Health	On-running through year
Midwifery	On-running through year
Your health abroad	On-running through year
Contagious diseases	On-running through year
Rabies	On-running through year
Drug abuse and AIDS	September onwards
Nursing recruitment campaign (Welsh Office)	September onwards
Health care Wales	On-running through year

Television was not involved in any of these campaigns either last year or in the current financial year.

Valleys Initiative

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the projects in the Cynon valley which are currently receiving funding under the valleys initiative; and from which budget or funds they are being supported.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The hon. Lady will be delighted that this is a lengthy reply.

The following projects and activities in the Cynon valley have benefited in 1988-89 or will benefit under the key programmes and initiatives identified in "The Valleys: A Progamme for the People":

Welsh Development Agency (WDA) Programmes

Five Cynon valley projects have been supported to date under the new valleys small loan scheme and valleys

enterprise loan scheme. Current WDA research on component supply includes a pilot project involving a Cynon valley based company.

Nine potential Cynon valley small businesses registered for a "Be Your Own Boss" course held in September 1988.

The advance factory and workshop programme includes the following projects which are currently under way:

Four 5,000 sq ft factories currently under construction at Aberaman
Site redevelopment at Hirwaun
Landscaping schemes at the Hirwaun industrial estate.

Discussions are taking place with Cynon valley borough council on providing additional small factories and valley workshops. Projects expected to go ahead in 1989-90 are 20,000 sq ft of small units at Hirwaun and sewer replacement in the same location.

The land reclamation programme includes schemes currently under way at:

Cwmcynon/Deep Duffryn (95 acres)
Graig y Dyffryn Tip (70 acres)
Abercwmboi tip (4 acres)

A further six schemes involving 300 acres are planned for future years.

The agency is supporting environmental improvement schemes at:

Bryntirion
Mount Pleasant street
Bryn Cynon club
Dare valley
Railway link—Monk street to Brynmawr
Victoria hall, Aberdare
Gap site, Abercwmboi
Riverside walk, Hirwaun
Robertstown, Aberdare
Abercynon

The Welsh Development Agency's renewal unit carried out a development study of Mountain Ash in 1988-89 jointly with the relevant local authorities. Following this the Welsh Development Agency's urban renewal programme includes support for:

Mountain Ash town square improvements
Landscaping on southern approach to Mountain Ash town centre
Feasibility study of a proposal to build 35,000 sq ft industrial workshop space at Mountain Ash
New footbridge construction at Mountain Ash

With the assistance of increased Welsh Development Agency funding in 1989-90 the Prince of Wales Committee is supporting:

Restoration of Tyle Morgug farmhouse Rhigos for use as activity centre
Restoration of Darwonno farm—phase II

Welsh Office support for industry and enterprise

During 1988-89, 69 projects in the Cynon Valley received offers of assistance under the regional selective assistance, regional development grant and regional enterprise grant schemes.

Local enterprise agency services were strengthened in 1988-89 by the establishment with Welsh Office support of a "One Stop Shop" scheme to be run by MADE and a new computer data base for MADE.

Export clinics will be held in the Cynon Valley area 1989-90. Approximately 50 companies will be invited to attend.

Training Agency programmes

The Training Agency provided more than 1,100 places in the Cynon Valley in 1988-89 under the youth training scheme, employment training, adult training and wider opportunities for women.

Urban Programme

Welsh Office urban programme allocations made in 1988-89 and for 1989-90 include the following projects in the Cynon valley:

Appointment of field development officer for the hearing impaired.
Aberdare craft and youth enterprise centre
An integrated approach to children in trouble
Access road, Ynysboeth industrial estate, Abercynon. phase 2
Conversion of Gadlys/SWEB buildings into youth enterprise centre.
Cynon valley women's aid
Litter abatement scheme
Housebound library scheme
Aberdare pedestrianisation scheme
Interpretation and tourism project, Dare valley country park
Business centre/enterprise centre Aberdare
Home improvement agency service
Library service scheme for Fernhill and Penywaun
Enterprise development workshop scheme—Cwmbach
Provision of community alarm system for elderly
Provision of grants and loans within industrial and commercial improvement areas
Provision of a community centre at Penywaun
Repairs to Coliseum theatre, Trecynon, Aberdare
Seed capital for new businesses
Cynon Valley MIND support and development project
Pedestrianisation of main shopping areas in town centre
Landscaping around by-pass and major roads
Development of respite care and family link scheme
Cynon valley community support unit
Environmental improvements to adjoining highways in Aberdare
Conversion to business units of the former station buildings, Aberdare
Provision of community centre, Fernhill, Mountain Ash
Salaries and running costs for the MADE business centre, Aberdare
Three nursery factory units at Aberaman
Refurbishment of Cwmamman public hall and institute
Establishment of Cynon valley groundwork trust
Purchase of equipment for Cynon valley Disabled Alliance sports section

Urban Development Grant

Welsh Office gave final approval of two projects for Urban Development Grant support in 1988-89:

Development of 19 low-cost houses at Aberaman.
Redevelopment of Park Cinema, Aberdare for shop and office premises.

Welsh Office support for housing

In 1988-89 the Welsh Office approved special allocations for the following enveloping schemes:

Wyndham crescent, Aberaman—114 houses
John street, Abercwmboi—71 houses
Glanlay street, Penrhiwceiber—82 houses
Carnetown, Abercynon—191 houses
King street/Queen street, Cwmdae—88 houses

Approval in principle has been given for a further three schemes to be undertaken for renovation of some 160 dwellings in 1989-90.

Welsh Office support for health and social services

A 40-bed unit for elderly people at Aberdare general hospital is programmed to start in July 1989 with completion anticipated in early 1991 with the assistance of 50 per cent. Welsh Office funding.

Diabetic liaison nurse care of the elderly in Merthyr Tydfil and Cynon valley was approved under the elderly initiative grant scheme in 1988-89.

Prince of Wales Committee tree and bulb planting campaign

With the assistance of Welsh Office support under the special grants (environmental) programme the Prince of Wales Committee organised the following schemes in 1988-89:

Railway Halt, Aberdare (Aberdare and District Civic Society)
Cwmbach church school
Cwmbach infant school
Hirwaun junior school

This is not a comprehensive list of activities. Further projects are being considered under the headings listed above. In addition the area stands to benefit from initiatives which have a wider geographical coverage and from other ongoing main programmes.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Horse Racing

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will supply a detailed breakdown of all financial grants made to individual horse racecourses in Britain by the Horserace Betting Levy Board since 1987.

Mr. John Patten: I understand from the board that its records are of annual totals of financial grants for direct expenditure by horse racecourses for particular purposes, not of grants to individual racecourses. For example, the annual grant of prize money is apportioned to individual racecourses by the Jockey Club.

Following is the information as to totals of grants for racecourses which is held by the board, for the financial years 1987-88 and 1988-89:

£'000s

	1987-88	1988-89
Prize money	12,000	12,850
Seventh race scheme	—	100
Daily grant	1,612	1,612
SUB TOTAL	13,612	14,562
Fixture fees	1,397	1,541
Fire and safety	115	323
Plastic running rail	187	275
Track ambulance	—	225
TOTAL	15,311	16,926

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provided a list of the levels of prize moneys at each registered horse racing course in Britain for each year since 1987;

(2) if he will provide a list of all horse racing courses in Britain, by region, showing the level of attendances at each course since 1987.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that the "Racing Industry Statistical Bureau Statistics", which are published by the Jockey Club, provide information on the annual totals of prize money and attendances at each approved horse race course in Britain over a period of five calendar years. The next edition of the statistics, to be published at the end of April, will therefore provide this information for 1984-88 inclusive.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will supply a list of all financial grants made by the Horserace Betting Levy Board to other horseracing bodies in Britain during 1987.

Mr. John Patten: Following is the information requested, for the financial years 1987-88 and 1988-89:

	1987-88 £	1988-89 £
Field Force Grant	1,425,000	1,132,000
Racehorse Publicity Agency	120,000	89,000
Horseracing Advisory Council	116,000	139,000
Apprentice School Charitable Trust	70,000	100,000
South Yorkshire Apprentice Training School	12,000	90,000
Farriers Apprentice Scheme	27,000	29,000
The Shire Horse Society	28,000	38,000
The National Pony Society	26,000	26,000
National Light Horse Breeding Society	110,000	110,000
The Arab Horse Society	8,000	12,000
The Welsh Pony and Cob Society	6,000	6,000
Irish Draught and Horse Society (Great Britain)	5,000	5,000
The Clevelant Bay Horse Society	5,000	7,000
The British Percheron Horse Society	5,000	5,000
The Clydesdale Horse Society	5,000	7,000
The Suffolk Horse Society	7,000	7,000
The Hackney Horse Society	7,000	7,000
Animal Health Trust	278,000	303,000
Equine Virology Research Foundation	58,000	50,000
Point to Point	144,000	151,000
Racing Industry Accident Benefit Scheme	—	25,000
Statistical Bureau	6,000	2,000
Horseracing Scientific Advisory Committee	5,000	5,000
Horseracing Forensic Laboratory Limited	1,117,000	1,613,000
Racecourse Technical Services Limited	4,493,000	4,716,000
Research Projects, Scholarships, Residentship and Travel Grants	645,000	665,000
Veterinary Advisory Committee	10,000	12,000
Bookmakers Committee	67,000	121,000
Totals	8,805,000	9,472,000

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown of the distribution of the finances raised by the Horserace Betting Levy Board in each year since 1983.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested, for each financial year from 1983-84 to 1987-88 inclusive, is given in the respective annual reports of the board, copies of which are in the Library. My right hon. Friend envisages laying the board's report for 1988-89 before the House in July this year.

Depot Site (Pyrton)

Mr. Heseltine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of any documents held by his Department relating to the acquisition, planning status, construction, rating and occupancy of the depot site in the parish of Pyrton in the county of Oxfordshire which have not been released to the Public Record Office.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The supply and transport branch of the Home Office occupied this depot between 10 November 1978 and 20 July 1987 under standing arrangements with the Property Services Agency. Home Office papers relate only to the administration of the depot

during this period and are of a routine nature: they will in due course be disposed of under the Public Record Acts of 1958 and 1967. I understand that copies of relevant papers are being placed in the Library by the Property Services Agency.

Asylum

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute procedures within the immigration service to ensure that persons applying for asylum on entry to the United Kingdom are dealt with in accordance with procedures laid down in the immigration rules and the obligations of the United Kingdom under international law.

Mr. Renton: Such procedures are already in place.

Electoral Register

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the reasons why the sale of the electoral register is allowed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Representation of the People Regulations 1986 provide for the publication and supply of the electoral register, including supply of copies at a prescribed fee. These provisions reflect the fact that the electoral register is a public document which needs to be in wide circulation for electoral purposes; and the conclusion that its use by commercial organisations could not effectively be prevented.

Citizenship

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each year since 1978, the number of citizens of the United Kingdom whose citizenship was revoked, providing the following information in each case *(a)* the reasons for which citizenship was revoked, *(b)* the country to which each individual was deported, and *(c)* the length of time between the granting of citizenship and its removal.

Mr. Renton: No order to deprive a person of citizenship has been made since 1973.

Holloway Prison

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what efforts are being made to recruit permanent nursing staff to Her Majesty's prison, Holloway; and what plans there are to improve C2 psychiatric unit.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Campaigns to recruit permanent nursing staff are undertaken regularly. Arrangements for the next campaign are in hand. Plans to replace the present facilities for psychiatric assessment with a purpose-built unit are being pursued.

Mr. Corbyn (Islington North): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the approved complement for medical units at Her Majesty's prison, Holloway; what is the current shortfall in permanent staff; and how often agency nurses are used to make up the numbers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The approved complement of nursing staff is 84. On 17 April 1989 a total of 47 of the posts were filled and 17 others were covered by agency nurses. Agency staff have been used for some years as a consequence of recruitment difficulties in London.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long the position of health care manager/chief medical officer has been vacant at Her Majesty's prison, Holloway; and when this vacancy will be filled.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The decision to create a post of health care manager was taken in September 1987. The post has been vacant since then. An appointment has now been made and takes effect on 1 May 1989.

Guildford Four

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to facilitate ease of legal access for solicitors acting for the Guildford Four; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The inmates may be visited by their legal representatives at their current prison locations. Any request for alternative facilities would be carefully considered.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will allow independent medical assessors to examine the Guildford Four prisoners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The physical and mental health of these prisoners is the responsibility of the prison medical officers of their respective establishments. Prison medical officers can arrange for a second opinion when this is clinically indicated.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what payments have been made by his Department to the Somerset and Avon constabulary in respect of their costs in inquiring into new evidence surrounding the conviction of the Guildford Four; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) yesterday.

Traffic Police

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state for police authorities in England and Wales the number of traffic officers employed in traffic branches in each force for the years 1980, 1985 and 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information for 1980 is not readily available. That for 1985 and 1988 is as follows:

Police forces in England and Wales

31 December	*Traffic division strengths* *1985*	*1988*
Avon and Somerset	295	251
Bedfordshire	99	95
Cambridgeshire	132	127
Cheshire	229	231
City of London	74	34
Cleveland	98	90
Cumbria	138	123

31 December	Traffic division strengths 1985	1988
Derbyshire	155	156
Devon and Cornwall	239	231
Dorset	136	114
Durham	132	132
Dyfed-Powys	120	103
Essex	277	257
Gloucestershire	142	84
Greater Manchester	496	448
Gwent	102	109
Hampshire	304	259
Hertfordshire	143	155
Humberside	167	166
Kent	265	159
Lancashire	283	294
Leicestershire	157	77
Lincolnshire	81	81
Merseyside	340	350
Metropolitan	896	906
Norfolk	103	112
Northamptonshire	75	76
Northumbria	258	247
North Wales	131	140
North Yorkshire	141	156
Nottinghamshire	181	183
South Wales	259	262
South Yorkshire	203	201
Staffordshire	242	239
Suffolk	106	101
Surrey	195	226
Sussex	264	246
Thames Valley	305	318
Warwickshire	101	112
West Mercia	113	216
West Midlands	540	452
West Yorkshire	427	381
Wiltshire	116	104
Total	9,260	8,804

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Hurd: The Home Office's crime and fire prevention campaigns continue, although there is no current press or television advertising. The only other publicity campaign planned for the three month period from April to June 1989 is a small probation officer recruitment campaign, starting 17 May and finishing 31 May.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assistance is being given to local authorities to enable them to cope with the influx of cases being referred to them for housing benefit from April; if his Department intends to carry out a review of delays due to the change over; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The only category of claimant who became entitled to housing benefit for the first time from April were people in board and lodging accommodation whose housing costs were formerly met from income support. This change was part of the April 1988 reforms of social security but implementation was postponed at the request of the local authority associations. The administrative arrangements for the transfer were discussed with the local authority associations and individual timetables for implementation were agreed locally between the Department's local office and local authorities. The Government made £1 million available to local authorities for their costs in preparing for this change. In addition, the overall level of provision for local authorities' housing benefit administration costs in 1989-90 has been increased by more than £7 million because of the expected increase in work load. There is thus no reason for the changeover to result in delays. Delay in general is kept under review as part of the Department's monitoring of the social security reforms.

Pensioners

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in the borough of Walsall will receive no actual increase in total benefit in April; and what is the number who will receive a sum less than the increase paid in the retirement pension.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 6 March at column *445*.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Department is running one publicity campaign involving television advertising in the first three months of 1989-90. The campaign is to promote the take-up of family credit. Paid advertising started on 13 April and is currently planned to run until 30 June.

Women's Help Centres

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women's help centres are in operation in the United Kingdom; and what percentage of their operating costs are funded by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Mellor: No figures are collected centrally on the numbers of refuges for battered women. However, the national voluntary organisation, Women's Aid Federation (England), estimates that there are some 256 refuges in the United Kingdom. None of these refuges receives central Government funding.

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to reply to the letter of 16 January 1989 from the hon. Member for Woolwich about the release of local education authorities' employees for Territorial Army training.

Mr. Neubert: I have now written to the hon. Member f cw42about this matter.

F111 Aircraft (Upper Heyford)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many F111 aircraft of the United States Government are currently stationed at Upper Heyford.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand that 78 F111 aircraft are assigned to RAF Upper Heyford.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he has given permission for an increase in the number of F1-11 aircraft of the United States Government stationed at Upper Heyford;

(2) what requests he has received from the United States Government for the extension of facilities for F1-11 aircraft at Upper Heyford; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he has had any discussions with the Secretary of Defense of the United States in relation to an increase in the number of F1-11 aircraft to be stationed at Upper Heyford.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 18 April 1989 to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen).

Dual-capable Artillery

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what number of dual-capable artillery pieces was held by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in 1986, 1987 and 1988; and what proportion in each year have been assigned a nuclear role.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested can be found in figure 15 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1986" (Cmnd. 9763-I), figure 16 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1987" (Cm. 101-I), and figure 19 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988" (Cm. 344-I).

Launchers

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many launchers of each type the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation had in its nuclear systems *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* at the latest available date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details of launchers for NATO's theatre nuclear forces have been given in successive Statements on the Defence Estimates.

Cyprus (Accommodation)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on accommodation for service personnel and their families in Cyprus and plans for its improvement.

Mr. Neubert: The standards of accommodation for service personnel and their families serving overseas are kept under regular review and a major study into both single and married accommodation is currently under way in Cyprus.

In the eastern sovereign base area a £3·5 million Army project of new build married quarters and single living accommodation, together with the upgrading of some existing single accommodation, was started in March 1988 and is due for completion in 1991. In the western sovereign base area a first phase of new build of 48 soldiers' married quarters began this year and will be completed in 1990 with further phases to follow. Extensive refurbishment of single accommodation is planned. At Akrotiri the RAF have a substantial refurbishment programme underway for both single and married accommodation and plans have been agreed for the construction of up to 100 airmen's married quarters over the next three years.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following publicity campaigns are currently under way or will be undertaken during the periods shown:

(a) NATO 40th anniversary postal slogan in April 1989, which appeared on approximately 46 million items of mail.

(b) NATO briefing tour in April 1989, which will visit six major towns and cities in the United Kingdom.

(c) NATO exhibitions from April until late in 1989, which is an annual exhibition, but which will be enhanced this year to reflect the 40th anniversary of NATO, and will visit 15 venues throughout the United Kingdom.

(d) National Employer Liaison Committee campaign, which started in September 1988 and will last for five years, and whose aim is to enhance the image of the Reserve services with employers.

(e) A regular recruitment campaign for Royal Navy and Royal Marines officers and other ranks, which will continue throughout the year, together with some smaller scale recruitment campaigns for specialist trades and reservists.

(f) A recruitment campaign for the Army which will run throughout the year as usual, aimed at officers, other ranks, and territorial reservists. This year the campaign will include limited television advertising from 31 March to 22 April, with a parallel campaign on Capital Radio. The television commercial will also be screened at 246 cinemas in London from 14 April to 22 June.

(g) A regular recruitment campaign for RAF officers and airmen, which will run throughout the year.

HEALTH

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since June 1987.

Mr. Mellor: In the four Departmental Select Committee reports completed since June 1987 which relate to what is now the Department of Health, and to which the Government have already responded, a total of 30 recommendations were made, of which four have been accepted by the Government in whole or in part. A further nine recommendations have been noted. Most of these reflected proposals in the recent White Paper, "Working for Patients" [CM 555]. Copies of Government replies to all four reports have been placed in the Library.

Staffing Costs

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of expenditure by each regional health authority on administrative and clerical agency staff in 1987-88.

Mr. Mellor: Following is the information for each health region derived from annual accounts submitted to the Department for 1987-88:

Expenditure on non-National Health Service (agency, etc.) administrative and clerical staff

	£000
Regions[1]	
Northern	137
Yorkshire	853
Trent	1,421
East Anglian	1,317
North-West Thames	9,613
North-East Thames	9,754
South-East Thames	6,680
South-West Thames	4,607
Wessex	1,346
Oxford	980
South Western	1,181
West Midlands	2,029
Mersey	184
North Western	518
Regions total	39,620
Special health authorities[2]	3,463
Total	43,083

[1] Regional and district health authorities.
[2] Special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
Note:—The figures include costs relevant to typing, secretarial and all other administrative and clerical staff.

Midwives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by sex how many midwives there are in the Trent regional health authority; what the figure was five and 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is in the table.

NHS Midwives in post at 30 September of each year Trent Region
Whole-time equivalent[1]

	1979	1984	1987
Total Midwives	1,827	21,211	[2]2,172
Male Staff	n/a	2	—
Female Staff	n/a	2,119	2,172

Source: Department of Health (SM13) annual census of NHS non-medical manpower.
[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest whole-time equivalent.
[2] Latest available.
n/a = Not available.

Mental Illness

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has as to the reasons for the disproportionate rate of mental illness among ethnic minorities

Mr. Freeman: None, but we are taking a close interest in research in this area which hopefully will suggest reasons for what seems to be a higher incidence of some forms of mental illness.

Pharmacists

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the amounts due to pharmacists in England and Wales for each year from 1978 to 1988 for the provision of pharmaceutical services; and what were the amounts paid and the profits earned for the same period.

Mr. Mellor: The amounts for England and Wales as shown in the balance sheets prepared with representatives of the profession are as follows; the basis of calculation change in 1985 from calendar years to financial years:

Year	*£ million*	*£ million*
Overpayment outstanding at beginning of 1978		8·0
1978	142·0	147·0
1979	170·9	155·4
1980	215·2	205·5
1981	238·9	246·7
1982	280·0	283·7
1983	324·8	301·3
1984	350·3	359·6
1 January 1985—31 March 1985	96·6	89·5
1985-86	383·7	390·1
1986-87	415·0	427·8
1987-88	485·8	443·2
Arrears payments: 1 July 1988 and 1 May 1989		45·3

Information for 1988-89 is not yet available. No information is held on profits earned by pharmacists.

Private Hospitals

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will institute an inspectorate of private hospitals with the responsibility of inspecting hospitals in the private sector and of providing a report annually to him which evaluates the level of patient care;

(2) if he will order an immediate investigation into the allegations of patient abuse at the private hospital at London bridge;

(3) if he will discuss with the chairman of the relevant district health authority the conduct of experimental treatment at the London Bridge hospital and its effect upon patient care.

Mr. Mellor: Registration and inspection of private hospitals is the responsibility of district health authorities. The authority concerned has already initiated inquiries into the allegations and is continuing discussions with London Bridge hospital. The treatment to which the hon. Member refers in fact had ceased by the time the allegations were made.

Heart Disease

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted into how much vigorous exercise is required by the age groups *(a)* under 14 years, *(b)* 14 to 23 years, *(c)* 23 to 50 years and *(d)* 50-plus years in order to significantly reduce the threat of heart disease; and what measures are being taken to encourage people to achieve these levels.

Mr. Mellor: The appropriate amount of exercise to help reduce the threat of heart disease will vary not only according to age but also according to each individual's physical and medical condition. It is not possible to quantify the amount of exercise that would be beneficial simply by broad age bands. The Sports Council

encourages participation in physical exercise and has published, jointly with the Health Education Authority, booklets on exercise which give "rule of thumb" guidelines on "testing" levels of fitness and measuring improvements in those who start to exercise regularly. These reflect the broad consensus of medical opinion that everyone would benefit from physical exercise and that 20 to 30 minutes exercise, on two or three occasions a week, is beneficial against coronary heart disease and brings many other benefits. I understand that the Sports Council hopes to carry out a national fitness survey in 1989-91.

AIDS

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding Health Service provision for AIDS.

Mr. Mellor: I have received three such representations. Two from the network of voluntary organisations in AIDS/HIV and one from the British Medical Association foundation for AIDS.

Unpasteurised Milk

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations have been made to his Department concerning the possible banning of unpasteurised green top milk; what would be the health repercussions of such a ban; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has received a number of letters from members of the public about a possible ban on the sale of unpasteurised milk.

The proposed ban would reduce the risks to consumers of salmonella and campylobacter infections. Other infections will also be made less likely, for example, streptococcus zoepidemicus, which in 1984 caused the deaths of eight people who had been drinking untreated milk.

Nurse Grading

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many successful nurses' grading appeals have been heard to date;

(2) how many nurses' grading appeals have been heard to date.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this information centrally.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses are currently fully qualified but have not yet received their PIN numbers.

Mr. Mellor: The issue of PIN numbers to qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors is a matter for the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Dame Audrey Emerton, DBE, chairman of the council if he is aware of any problems in this matter.

Radioactivity (Accidents)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those district health authorities, which do not have designated medical physics departments for the purposes of his Department's circulars HC(89) and HN (FP) (89) 8 on arrangements for dealing with accidents involving radioactivity.

Mr. Mellor: The relevant circular requires regional health authorities to let the Department have details of designated medical physics departments by 31 July 1989. I shall write to the right hon. Member when this information has been received and collated.

Hospital Sites (Sales)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department lays down any guidelines to regional health authorities about the advertising for sale of hospital sites on which no closure decision or consultation has taken place.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for local management.

Rural GPs

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average list size of a general practitioner in rural practice in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The average list size of general practitioners in receipt of rural practice allowance (payable if 10 per cent. or more patients live in rural areas) in England at 1 October 1987 was 2,020. Figures for previous years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average general practitioner salary for doctors in rural practices in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The information is not available.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the payments for child immunisation targets and cervical cytology targets for doctors in dispersed rural areas under the proposed general practitioner contracts.

Mr. Mellor: Our proposals for target payments to general practitioners who achieve the target levels of coverage for childhood immunisation and cervical cytology will apply equally to rural and non-rural doctors.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will define the concept of rurality to be used as a basis for providing supplementary capitation allowances under the proposed general practitioner contracts.

Mr. Mellor: We propose that a rural capitation supplement to basic practice allowance should be related to population density in future; areas of greatest sparsity attracting the highest level of supplement.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the level of estimated payments to be made to general practitioners in rural practices for health promotion work and under the proposed practitioner contracts;

(2) if he will make a statement on the provision for elderly patients in rural areas under the proposed general practitioner contracts.

Mr. Mellor: The proposals set out in "A New Contract" make clear that the provision of health promotion, including the offer of three-yearly check-ups,

and annual check-ups for patients aged 75 and over, will be made specific requirements in general medical practitioners' terms of service. We intend to introduce a new sessional fee for health promotion clinics, and to raise significantly the level of the capitation fee for patients aged 75 and over. These proposals will apply equally to general practitioners in rural and non-rural areas. The amounts of these payments have not been decided.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of night fees which may be paid to doctors other than from the patient's own practice in sparsely populated rural areas.

Mr. Mellor: Under the Government's proposals a higher level of night visit fee will be payable if the visit is made by the patient's own doctor or by a partner or another member of the group practice. A lower fee will be payable if another doctor sees the patient. The same arrangements are proposed for both rural and urban areas. The amounts of the fees have not been decided.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or the Health Education Authority, respectively, or planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Mellor: There are no publicity campaigns being conducted by my Department or planned for the first three months of 1989-90 involving television advertising.

The following publicity campaigns are current or planned:

	Start	*Finish*
Nurse recruitment		
Youth audience magazines	June only	
Adult audience national press	June	September
Drugs misuse		
Centrally funded regional campaigns in Wessex, Trent and South East Thames	March	May
National Health Service recruitment		
Mailing of recruitment materials to careers officers	April	

In addition to the above the Department maintains information and awareness campaigns which run throughout the year which include the following:

National blood transfusion service—donor recruitment.

Organ donation—promotion of donor cards; awareness amongst National Health Service professional staff.

Overseas travel—information for those travelling abroad.

Services for the disabled—information.

Free or subsidised National Health Service services for low income groups—information

The Health Education Authority's current and planned publicity campaigns include:

	Start	*Finish*
AIDS		
Encourage condom use—		
Women's magazines	March	June
Travellers abroad—Poster	June	End of summer
Skin cancer		
Those travelling abroad on holiday—Women's magazines	June	End of summer
"Less Fat Fortnight"		
Consumption of lower fat products—Press	June only	
Alcohol abuse		
National drinkwise day—sensible approach to alcohol consumption	June 20	

None of these publicity campaigns involve television advertising.

Griffiths Report

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish his Department's response to the Griffiths report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 6 April at column *291*.

Public Service Broadcasts

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the likely implications for the transmission of Channel 4 of public service broadcasts emanating from his Department of the White Paper "Broadcasting in the 90s: Competition Choice and Quality".

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 17 March at column *383*. I am not aware that the arrangements will be any different for Channel 4.

Family Practitioners

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has as to the average number of hours per week spent by full-time family practitioner *(a)* National Health Service work and *(b)* other medical work on and the amounts earned in respect of each; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The survey of general medical practitioners' workload carried out in 1985-86 showed that the average GMP worked about 38 hours a week on general medical services duties. In addition a further 30 hours a week was spent on call during which time no duties were performed. Over and above his general medical services commitments the average GMP who undertakes non-general medical services work spent six hours a week on that work.

The review body on doctors' and dentists' remuneration recommends the level of GMPs' income each year. In 1989-90 GMPs' average gross income will be £60,000. This figure reflects the review body's recommendation in respect of GMPs net income and indirectly reimbursed expenses which the Government have accepted in full, plus

estimated directly reimbursed expenses. Information about the average amount earned on non-general medical services work by GMPs undertaking such work is not known.

Accountants

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified accountants are currently employed in the National Health Service and how many extra will be required by April 1991 to implement the Government's White Paper, "Working for Patients."

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* Information on the numbers of qualified accountants employed by health authorities is not routinely collected. The latest available information relates to 31 December 1987, when a survey showed that there were about 1,100 qualified accountants in post in England, Scotland and Wales. We will be working with health authorities to establish the need for additional qualified accountants to implement the proposals in "Working for Patients" (Cm. 555).

Health Education

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to introduce incentives for health authorities to invest money in health education.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* Prevention of ill health and the promotion of good health is a Government priority. Health education is a key part of that, especially given the relationship between so many diseases and personal behaviour such as smoking, alcohol, sexual behaviour, diet and exercise. However, it is for health authorities to determine how the resources allocated to them are apportioned between all the services for which they are responsible, including health education. Authorities' work is monitored and health education has featured in ministerial reviews of English health authorities for the past two years. The importance the Government give to health education was reflected in the establishment of the Health Education Authority in 1987. One of the authority's functions is to plan and carry out work in co-operation with health authorities and act as a national centre of information and advice on health education. In addition the recommendation in the chief medical officer's report "Public Health in England" that directors of public health be appointed in each district and produce an annual report on the health of the population they serve is being implemented. The annual reports will be public documents and will draw attention to local health education issues, providing an additional incentive to action.

Factor 8

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what controls on imported factor 8 are being applied to the factor 8 currently being supplied in the United Kingdom on named product basis by the German-based company Octapharnna Gmbh; and what implications such controls have for the health of British haemophiliacs.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* Factor 8 is being supplied by Octapharnna Gmbh for use in a clinical trial under the terms of the Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Clinical Trial) Order 1981 (SI 1981/164). This states that this product can only be used in accordance with the conditions of the trial and with the informed consent of the patient.

In addition, any physician, on his own responsibility, can order this factor 8 for use on a named patient basis.

The Department is satisfied that the blood meets the requirements of both EC and WHO guidelines and the requirements specified in the BP (Addendum 1386) monograph for factor 8.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Teacher Training

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why the Department of Education (NI) has introduced an annual bursary of £1,300 per annum for postgraduate teacher training courses in physis, chemistry and mathematics.

Dr. Mawhinney: In order to increase the supply of teachers in England and Wales trained to teach physics, chemistry, mathematics and craft, design and technology, a bursary scheme was introduced there in 1986 for all students studying for postgraduate certificates in education in these disciplines. This coincided with this year's relaxation of the embargo on awards to Northern Ireland students undertaking PGCE courses in Great Britain. There are no teacher shortages in Northern Ireland, but in the light of subsequent experience with the number and quality of applicants wishing to pursue these disciplines in local institutions, it became clear that there was a requirement for parity of incentive and it was therefore decided to introduce a parallel bursary scheme in Northern Ireland, thus ensuring the supply of appropriately trained teachers.

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for postgraduate certificate of education courses were received by Queen's university, Belfast, for courses commencing in 1986, 1987 and 1988; and how many of the places available were for teacher training courses in physics, chemistry and mathematics.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:—

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Total applications for PGCE courses	672	640	625
Places available for teacher training courses in:			
Physics	10	12	10
Chemistry	10	12	10
Mathematics	14	16	15

Young People

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many 16 and 17-year-olds were in receipt of bridging allowance at the end of October 1988, November 1988, December 1988, January 1989, February 1989 and March 1989.

Mr. Viggers: It is estimated that the following numbers were in receipt of bridging allowance in each relevant month:

	Number
October 1988	914
November 1988	808
December 1988	807
January 1989	895
February 1989	458
March 1989	344

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many 16 and 17-year-olds currently receive income support and bridging allowance.

Mr. Viggers: At the end of March 344 persons were receiving bridging allowance and there are currently three claimants receiving income support under the severe hardship provisions. No figures are available for those receiving income support under the normal rules.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many 16 and 17-year-olds who previously received income support were transferred to bridging allowance after new benefit rules were introduced in September.

Mr. Viggers: A total of 986 young people were transferred to bridging allowance from income support.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will explain the methods being used to provide publicly available information on 16 and 17-year-olds who remain unemployed after the ending of the bridging allowance payments or extended child benefit.

Mr. Viggers: No such information is currently made available.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people of YTS eligible age, registered with jobcentres or the careers service were awaiting an offer of a YTS place at the end of October 1988, November 1988, December 1988, January 1989, February 1989 and March 1989; and of them, how many were receiving bridging allowance or extended child benefit or income support or a severe hardship grant from the social fund.

Mr. Viggers: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide figures for the number of young people no longer on bridging allowance who have not yet been allocated a YTS place.

Mr. Viggers: The number of young people no longer receiving bridging allowance who have not yet been allocated a YTP place is 140. Some of these young people have been submitted to YTP schemes and results are awaited.

Harland and Wolff

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that the terms and conditions of the employees of Harland and Wolff are protected when the undertaking is transferred to the privatised company.

Mr. Viggers: On 22 March 1989 I approved, on behalf of the Government, heads of agreement for the sale of H&W plc to a management-employee buy-out team, backed by Mr. Olsen. The terms and conditions of the employees of the privatised company will be a matter for the new owners.

Sectarian Funerals

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the present system of promulgation of information relating to the routing and timing of sectarian funerals; whether the cause of the failure to brief the late Corporals David Howes and Derek Wood in this respect, has been remedied; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 12 April 1989]:* These are operational matters for the general officer commanding and the Chief Constable.

EMPLOYMENT

Skill Shortages

82. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about Government measures to alleviate skill shortages in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Cope: There are a number of Government measures designed to alleviate skill shortages in all industries. These include the setting up of training and enterprise councils to enable employers to define and meet local skill needs. The Government is also helping young people and the unemployed to learn new skills through YTS, employment training and the recently announced business growth training.

Training Shortages

83. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to what extent a lack of trained personnel is threatening the ability of United Kingdom industry to meet the surge in demand.

Mr. Cope: Previous figures cannot express completely the extent of the threat. The most recent quarterly survey of industrial trends, conducted in January 1989 by the Confederation of British Industry, reported that 25 per cent. of manufacturing firms in the United Kingdom anticipated that a shortage of skilled labour would limit output over the coming four months.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment further to his reply of 13 December 1988, *Official Report*, column 535, if he will make a further statement on the changes to calculation of the unemployment figures in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing to add to my previous reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils (West Midlands)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils he expects to approve in the west midlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I published a prospectus on 10 March inviting employers to form training and enterprise councils (TECs) in their local area. Response to TECs in the west midlands or elsewhere has been excellent. Groups of employers have been asked to apply for development funding. The deadline for first bids is 28 April. Decisions on the numbers of TECs will be taken when the bids are considered.

Business Growth Through Training

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of Business Growth Through Training.

Mr. Cope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched business growth training on 11 April 1989. The reaction that we have had from employers has been most encouraging. The Training Agency will be evaluating the impact of the new programme on business performance.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many specialist inspectors have left the Health and Safety Executive in the last 12 months; and how many have been *(a)* retirements and *(b)* resignations.

Mr. Nicholls: Between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989, 17 specialist inspectors have left the Health and Safety Executive; of these, five retired, nine resigned and three transferred to other Government Departments.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many mines inspectors and quarries inspectors the Health and Safety Executive had in place on 1 April.

Mr. Nicholls: On 1 April 1989 the Health and Safety Executive employed 58 mines inspectors and 11 quarries inspectors.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive's budget provision for the next three years.

Mr. Nicholls: Gross provision for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive in the three years from 1 April last is £118·3 million, £125·9 million and £133·5 million. The provision allows for real growth in the executive's activities in all three years, including an increase in the number of inspectors, and of inspections. Details will be published shortly in the commission's plan of work for 1989-90 and beyond.

Mining (Accidents)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will estimate the number of accidents that go unreported in the mining industry.

Mr. Nicholls: While under-reporting of accidents is significant in some industries, there is no evidence that it occurs to any marked degree in the mining industry.

Disabled People

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to improve access for disabled people to tourist attractions.

Mr. Lee: The English Tourist Board's advisory committee on visitor attractions has drawn up a voluntary code of practice for operators, which includes recomendations on access for disabled people. This code of practice is to be piloted in the west country in the near future, with the aim, following further consultations, of issuing the code in early 1990.

Co-operative Development Agency

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the future of the Co-operative development agency; and what has been his response.

Mr. Cope: I have received written representations from 14 organisations on the future of the Co-operative Development Agency. I have also received representations from a Co-operative parliamentary delegation.

All the representations are currently under consideration.

Film and Television Industries

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why the report into the film and television industries by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has not been made publicly available.

Mr. Cope: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report entitled "Labour Practices in TV and Film Making" (Cm. 666) was laid before Parliament on 13 April. Copies are available to Members from the Vote Office and from HMSO bookshops.

YTS Allowance

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the level of the 1983 YTS allowance would have been had it risen annually in line with *(a)* the retail price index, *(b)* average earnings and *(c)* the average yearly rate of inflation.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The YTS allowance was £25 per week in April 1983. If the allowance had been increased in line with changes in the retail price index it would have been £33·17 in February 1989. If adjusted in line with increases in the average earnings index, the allowance would have been £38·69 in January 1989. Adjusting the allowance for the rate of inflation is equivalent to the adjustment made for changes in the retail prices index. Many trainees receive more than the minimum level of the trainee allowance.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which items included in the 1988-89 estimated outturn columns of table 7.29 on page 25 of the public expenditure White Paper published in January were not included in the estimated total of £17·8 million on publicity spending by his Department given in the answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 13 March, *Official Report*, column *56*.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Since the public expenditure White Paper and my previous answer were published, later information has become available.

The latest estimated total for publicity expenditure for the Department of Employment in 1988-89 is £18·3

million. It includes expenditure for the employment service, but excludes that for the Training Agency, ACAS and the Health and Safety Executive.

The expenditure for the Training Agency, which was given in the reply to the hon. Member on 13 March 1989, *Official Report*, column 55, excludes expenditure for the skills training agency (shown as "Other TA publicity" in the PEWP table).

Job Clubs

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what conclusions he draws from his Department's statistical information on whether assistance to the long-term unemployed is better provided by employment service jobcentres or private job clubs.

Mr. Lee *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* At the end of February 1989, the job entry rate, or percentage of people leaving job clubs to go into jobs, was 56 per cent. for employment service job clubs against 52 per cent. from external job clubs. However the gap in performance is closing; at the end of March 1988 employment service job clubs had a job entry rate of 57 per cent. and external job clubs 50 per cent. In some employment service areas external job clubs are now performing as well as or better than their employment service counterparts. A number of initiatives, such as improved job club leader training, are in progress which should further improve performance.

External job clubs already provide valuable help to long term unemployed people and statistics suggest they are capable of performing broadly as well as those directly run by the employment service.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of the destinations of job club participants since the start of the initiative to the most recent date, by year, for the north-west region and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Lee *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Details of the destinations of job club participants since the year to 31 March 1987 are given in the table. Comparable earlier statistics are not available.

Date	*North West*			*Great Britain*		
	Number into jobs	*Number into other positive outcomes*	*Per cent. into total positive outcomes*	*Number into jobs*	*Number into other positive outcomes*	*Per cent. into total positive outcomes*
Year to 31 March 1987	2,280	611	71	10,910	2,364	73
Year to 31 March 1988	10,623	2,709	69	57,080	14,883	68
11 months to 27 February 1989	11,590	3,307	70	64,179	18,032	69

Note: Other positive outcomes include training, full-time education, self-employment, a place on community programme and now employment training.

Skill Centres

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employment training places are currently contracted within skill centres; and what guarantees he will obtain as to their future post-privatisation.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The number of employment training (ET) places currently contracted is 11,774. The skills training agency obtained these places in competition with other training providers, and private sector skill centres will be free to compete for ET places in the same way.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Cope: The table below gives the information requested in respect of women in the Employment Department group in the grades specified. Overall, 34,485 (66·6 per cent.) out of the group's 51,751 administrative staff are women.

Grade	*Total staff in grade*	*Number of women in grade*	*Percentage women*
G1	2	0	0·0
G2	5	0	0·0
G3	27	3	11·1
G4	12	0	0·0
G5	111	17	15·3
G6	120	14	11·7
G7	785	124	15·8

In common with the rest of the Civil Service, the Employment Department group has carried out surveys of the ethnic origin of its staff. The surveys were undertaken on the basis of voluntary self classification. Results for 1 April 1989 show:

Grade	*Total respondents*	*Ethnic minority respondents*	*Percentage*
Grades 1-6	469	3	0·6
Grade 7	1,088	9	0·8
All staff	54,077	2,501	4·6

A code of practice on the use of ethnic data exists to safeguard the confidentiality of individuals who have responded to the survey. For this reason we have not provided figures by individual grades for grades 1 to 6.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The first survey of ethnic origin of staff took place in 1986 and was undertaken on the basis of voluntary self classification. A further inquiry was sent to all staff for

whom the information was not held in November 1988. As a result we now know the ethnic origin of 91·5 per cent. of Employment Department group staff. My Department is now considering whether further action is required.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Cope: Recruitment at grade 7 level and above is undertaken by the Civil Service Commission on behalf of my Department. Members of Employment Department group staff from ethnic minority backgrounds are participating in a series of newspaper advertisements being run by the commission to encourage more people from ethnic minorities to apply for professional posts. My Department is currently examining its effectiveness in selecting graduates with ethnic minority backgrounds, both externally and from our own staff for the "fast stream" schemes of management trainee and administration trainee/higher executive officer (development).

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what new measures the Training Agency has undertaken in response to the report on racial inequality published in 1988 by the youth employment and training resource unit entitled "The Firms That Like to Say No".

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* This report presents a selective and biased account of the representation of ethnic minority young people within YTS, and calls for no specific response. The Training Agency is, however, continuing its efforts to increase the proportion of ethnic minority trainees in employer-led YTS schemes. It is currently preparing improved marketing materials and new good-practice guidelines for managing agents. and is exploring with employer interests ways in which employers may improve and encourage access to training and employment opportunities for ethnic minority young people. A video is also in production to market YTS to ethnic minority young people.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details in for the nine standard economic regions, of the total numbers of entrants and leavers, excluding community programme transfers, to employment training by sex, ethnic origin and disability.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The information is not available in the precise form requested. Information is only available for entrants for the eight Training Agency regions in England and for Scotland and Wales. The information for entrants to employment training to the end of February 1989 is given in table 1. The number of these entrants who have left employment training is currently only available for Great Britain as a whole and is estimated to be 50,000.

Table 1
Details of entrants to employment training to end February 1989

Percentage

Region	*Entrants numbers*	*Men*	*Women*	*Ethnic origin*[1]					*PWD*[2]
				1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	
South East	11,891	65	35	90	2	2	3	3	15
London	18,193	59	41	50	25	12	7	6	10
South West	11,081	68	32	93	2	1	2	2	16
West Midlands	22,564	69	31	79	9	8	2	2	12
East Midlands and Eastern	15,984	73	27	87	4	6	1	2	15
Yorkshire and Humberside	28,899	75	25	90	2	5	1	2	11
North West	30,202	72	28	92	2	3	1	2	12
Northern	20,473	75	25	96	1	..	1	2	9
Wales	14,627	71	29	94	1	1	1	3	12
Scotland	22,512	73	27	96	..	1	1	2	11

[1] Ethnic groups: 1. White.
2. Black/African/Caribbean descent.
3. Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Sri Lankan descent.
4. None of these.
5. Prefer not to say.

[2] PWD—People with disabilities—People with a long-term health problem or disability which affects the work they can do.
..—Less than 0·5 per cent.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the most recent scheme by scheme details of the numbers of entrants and leavers, excluding community programme transfers, to employment training by sex, ethnic origin and disability in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Figures for entrants for the Greater Manchester area are provided in the following table. Information for these entrants who have now left employment training will be available in the summer.

Table 1
Details of entrants to employment training to end February 1989

Percentage

	Greater Manchester
Entrants Numbers	11,208
Men	72
Women	28
Ethnic groups	
White	88
Black/African/Caribbean descent	4
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Sri Lankan descent	4
None of these	2
Prefer not to say	2
PWD—People with disabilities[1]	[2]—

[1]People with a long-term health problem or disability which affects the work they can do.
[2]Information not available for Greater Manchester. Proportion PWD for North West region is 12 per cent.

Legionnaires' Disease

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals exist within the Health and Safety Executive to review policy on Legionnaires' disease and air-conditioning systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The Health and Safety Executive is currently undertaking a review of policy on this subject for the Health and Safety Commission. The commission will inform me of the outcome of this review as soon as possible.

ENVIRONMENT

Footpaths

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the subject of the Ramblers Association 1989 footpaths appeal; what measures he is planning to prevent footpaths being removed from definitive maps and to encourage local authorities to clear signposts and improve local paths; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received a number of representations supporting the Ramblers Association's campaign to protect public footpaths. Successive Governments have recognised the importance of the rights of way network in providing access to the countryside for quiet enjoyment, and have given local authorities the duty of ensuring that such paths are recorded, maintained, and signposted where appropriate, and made available for public use. The Countryside Commission, through its "Enjoying the Countryside" initiative, has sought to encourage and assist local authorities to give appropriate priority to this work.

Footpaths can be removed from definitive maps only by means of the statutory procedures providing for the creation, diversion and extinguishment of public paths. The Government propose to amend these provisions, in the light of the Rubinstein judgment, to restore the power to correct mistakes on such maps, where there is evidence to show that a right to way, or its status, was recorded in error.

Recreational Facilities

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how many acres of playing fields in *(a)* state schools and *(b)* private schools have been added in each of the last five years and how many have been lost to development; how many acres of private sports grounds have been added in each of the last 10 years and how many have been lost to development.

Mr. Moynihan: This information is not held centrally. As far as school playing fields are concerned, local education authorities are required to meet the minimal standards prescribed by the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. There have been some studies of private sports grounds which show that the position varies from area to area. While there has been a reduction in the number of grounds in industrial ownership there has been a substantial increase in both the quantity and quality of provision in the voluntary sector, for example, approximately 100 new artificial turf pitches have been provided in the last 10 years.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis recreational need is assessed or calculated for the purposes of public inquiries.

Mr. Moynihan: The body or individual making the planning decision, whether a local authority, a planning officer or the Secretary of State, should consider the merits of the case having regard to all the relevant provisions of the development plan. They should also give consideration to the regional recreation strategies prepared by the regional councils for sport and recreation.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the significant regional variations in the provision per head of population of urban recreational open space.

Mr. Moynihan: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what his Department recommends for the number of acres of playing fields per head of population; and what information he has on the figures recommended by (i) the National Playing Fields Association and (ii) the Sports Council.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department makes no recommendations about the average size of playing fields to be provided per head of the population. However, circular 33/70 encourages local planning authorities to consult with the appropriate sports council (now regional council for sport and recreation) on such matters. I understand that the regional councils for sport and recreation take into account the frequency of play and the days of peak demand in offering advice. The National Playing Fields Association recommends 6 acres per 1,000 people.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many additional areas of recreational open space would be available to the community if dual use became universal.

Mr. Moynihan: So far as I am aware, no assessment has been made of the additional areas of recreational open space which would be available as a result of universal dual use.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how his Department recognises and assesses increase in latent demand for sporting provision in the light of Government supported campaigns for healthy lifestyles and increased sports participation.

Mr. Moynihan: The Sports Council have a research programme which monitors and assesses the demand for sporting provision. The results of this research underpin the council's strategies as set out in its annual corporate plan and in its longer-term strategy documents.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance is provided by his Department in the form of target figures for provision of outdoor recreation land within urban district boundaries.

Mr. Moynihan: Circular 33/70 sets out the Government's general policy on the provision of recreational facilities. It is for local authorities to decide specific target figures in consultation with local or regional sports councils and in the light of all material considerations. Circular 33/70 encourages local authorities to identify private open spaces in their development plan.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of what are the most popular forms of physical recreation *(a)* indoors and *(b)* outdoors, and of what is the stated and latent demand for facilities for these activities and the anticipated provision in the next five years.

Mr. Moynihan: The table shows, by sport, the percentage of all adults participating in each activity in a four-week period immediately prior to interview. The figures are taken from the general household survey (1986). (Figures are rounded up).

	1977	*1980*	*1983*	*1986*
Outdoor				
1. Walking/rambling/hiking (2 miles or more)	17	19	19	19
2. Football	3	3	3	3
3. Golf	2	2	2	3
4. Athletics—track and field (including jogging)	1	1	2	3
5. Swimming (including public pools)	2	2	3	2
6. Cycling	1	1	2	2
7. Fishing	2	2	2	2
8. Tennis	1	2	1	1
9. Bowls	1	1	1	1
10. Camping/caravanning	1	1	1	1
11. Cricket	1	1	1	1
12. Horse riding	1	1	1	1
Indoor				
1. Swimming	5	6	7	9
2. Snooker/billiards/pool	6	7	8	9
3. Darts	9	7	7	6
4. Keep fit/yoga	1	2	3	3
5. Squash	2	2	3	2
6. Badminton	2	2	2	2
7. Gymnastics/athletics	—	1	1	2
8. Bowls/tenpin	1	1	1	2
9. Table tennis	2	2	1	1

Information about the demand for facilities is not held centrally.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to what percentage of urban recreation land lost to development has been replaced within the urban area; and what percentage has been replaced in the urban fringe.

Mr. Moynihan: This information is not held centrally. There have however been a number of local studies which suggest that, although the position varies from area to area, the overall provision of recreational land has remained fairly static.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how many acres of municipally owned recreation grounds have been added in each of the last 10 years and how many have been lost to development.

Mr. Moynihan: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how many planning applications for development of recreational open space have been approved by *(a)* local planning authorities and *(b)* at appeal in the last 10 years.

Mr. Moynihan: Information about approvals given by local authorities is not held centrally. In the case of appeals, the Department does not keep records of decisions in a form which would enable me to provide the information requested.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which participation in sport and recreation is related to availability of facilities within walking distance for *(a)* car-owners and *(b)* non-car-owners.

Mr. Moynihan: Research carried out by the Sports Council show that on average 20 per cent. of those people using swimming pools and indoor sports centres travel more than five miles to reach the facilities. Thirty six per cent. travel less than one mile. Cars are the most popular mode of transport to sports facilities although there are variations from region to region. Fifty two per cent. of swimming pool users travel by car compared with 25 per cent. who walk. Studies of indoor sports centres show that 67 per cent. of users travel by car whilst only 8 per cent. walk.

Car ownership is one factor which determines the use of a facility. However other factors such as the size and management of the facility and the availability of competition are also important.

Sport

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been undertaken or commissioned by his Department to determine the extent to which people who take part in vigorous sport on a regular basis smoke less than average; and what measures are being taken to increase participation.

Mr. Moynihan: The general household survey shows that those people who participate in sport are slightly less likely to smoke than those who do not participate, whatever their age or income.

The measures being undertaken by the Sports Council to increase participation are described in the following publications:

The Sports Council Corporate Plan 1989-90;
The Sports Council Annual Report 1987-88;
A Strategy for Sport 1988-1993;
Sport in the Community, Into the '90's

Copies are available from the Sports Council.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the gap identified in the Wolfenden report between participation in sport before and after leaving school has been closed; whether he is now seeking an increase in post-school participation in the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The Sports Council has identified that participation in sport falls sharply once young people have left school. Figures taken from the general household survey (1986) show that there has, over the last five years been an increase, in percentage terms, in the number of

young people participating in indoor sports but a slight decrease in those participating in outdoor sports. The Sports Council has adopted a variety of policies and initiatives aimed at fostering increased participation among this age group.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to what extent the Sports Council campaign to increase sporting participation amongst young people has been successful; and what are its present aspirations in this area.

Mr. Moynihan: The Sports Council has identified that participation in sport falls sharply once young people have left school. The council has adopted a variety of policies and initiatives, including the "Ever thought of Sport"? and "What's your Sport"? campaigns, aimed at reducing this trend.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria are established by his Department for the purpose of public inquiries as to how protection of *(a)* so-called "green lungs" and *(b)* view by residents are to be assessed.

Mr. Moynihan: The body or individual making the planning decision, whether a local authority, a planning officer or the Secretary of State, should consider the merits of the case having regard to the relevant provisions of the development plan and all other material considerations.

Departmental Circulars

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department intends to issue a planning circular to replace circular 33/70.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department hopes to issue a planning policy guidance note covering sport and recreation towards the end of this year. The PPG will consolidate and update the existing planning guidance, including that given in circular 33/70.

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that private landlords who collect the community charge from their tenants keep accurate records of payments made by each tenant; and how the money will be recovered if any such landlord fails to pay in these sums in full by the date of enforcement action for recovery taking place.

Mr. Gummer: Landlords will be responsible for collecting contributions towards the community charge only where a dwelling has been designated for the purposes of the collective community charge. There is a legal requirement on such landlords to keep records, and it is for charging authorities to ensure that the law is complied with. No recovery action for a collective community charge can be taken against a tenant, whose sole liability is to pay contributions to the landlord. Landlords who fail to pay the charge are subject to the same remedies as other charge-payers, and in addition, where a debt exceeds £1,000, a local authority may apply to the court for a charging order on the property.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce imprisonment as a penalty for non-payment of the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: Imprisonment has always been available as a sanction of last resort where an individual refuses to pay rates, and where it is not possible to recover the outstanding amount through distraint. The remedies available to a charging authority for non-payment of a community charge have been widened to include, in addition to distraint, attachment of earnings and deductions from income support, to give people the opportunity to pay off arrears over time. If it proves impossible to recover the debt, a magistrates' court will be able to commit a person to prison but only if, having inquired into his means in his presence, the court are satisfied that his failure to pay was due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect.

Babbington Colliery Tip

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial assistance his Department has given to reclaim the former Babbington colliery tip in Nottingham.

Mr. Chope: None. Responsibility for dealing with the tip rests with British Coal in accordance with the planning permission for tipping granted by Nottinghamshire county council.

AIDS

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage housing departments and associations to work on the issue of AIDS/HIV and housing; whether he intends to make resources available either through a special allocation or through the housing investment programme; and if he will support the recommendations of the local authority officers working group on AIDS and HIV report, "Housing and HIV Infection."

Mr. Trippier: My Department is considering jointly with the Department of Health the housing implications of AIDS/HIV infection, taking account of the working group's report and other information.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Ridley: The Civil Service Commission is responsible for recruitment of top grades to all Departments of the Civil Service. Recruitment is carried out on the principle of fair and open competition.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Ridley: The number of *(a)* women and *(b)* ethnic minorities in grades 1-7 employed in the Department of the Environment as at 3 April 1989 are:

(a) Percentage of officers who are women

Grade	DOE		PSA	
	Number of women	Percentage of women	Number of women	Percentage of women
1	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0
3	3	8·3	0	0
4	1	10·0	0	0
5	21	12·8	2	3·8
6	19	7·8	2	1·1
7	105	14·1	21	3·1
Total	149	12·3	25	2·7
All grades	3,051	42·8	4,087	28·8

(b) Percentage of officers who are members of ethnic minorities

Grade	DOE		PSA	
	Number ethnic minorities[1]	Percentage ethnic minorities[1]	Number ethnic minorities[1]	Percentage ethnic minorities[1]
1	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0
3	0	0	0	0
4	0	0	0	0
5	3	2·1	1	2·4
6	2	1·0	2	1·3
7	4	0·7	12	2·2
Total	9	0·9	15	1·9
All grades	350	7·3	412	3·8

[1] Non-respondents to surveys not included.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The Department completed its voluntary survey of the ethnic origins of staff already in post in the autumn of 1987. This information is kept up to date on a continuous basis by asking job applicants to complete a questionnaire about their ethnic origin.

Water Rates

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average increase in water rates from 1 April by *(a)* water authorities and *(b)* statutory water companies.

Mr. Howard: I estimate that the average increase in all water charges is likely to be 9·8 per cent. for the water authorities and about 22 per cent. for the water companies. Information on the average rates levied on customers charged by rateable value is not yet available. I will publish the information requested in the *Official Report* as soon as practicable.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the average domestic water rate bill in (i) the current financial year and (ii) the financial year 10 years ago for *(a)* the Thames water authority region and *(b)* nationally; and if he will indicate the extent of the increase in real terms.

Mr. Howard: The average domestic water rate bill in 1979-80 for the Thames water authority region was £38·62, and for the whole of England, £41·47. Corresponding data for 1989-90 are not yet available.

Climatic Change

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the hon. Member for Linlithgow may expect a substantive answer to his questions of 10 April relating to climatic change.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: These questions were answered on 12 and 13 April at columns *586* and *667*.

Housing Associations

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to bring forward the tenants' incentive scheme and other measures to assist housing association members to attain home ownership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 22 March at column *642*.

Rate Precepts

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which three county councils have had the largest rate increase since 1981-82; and by how much they have increased.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

County councils with highest precept increases between 1981-82 and 1989-90

Rank and county council	Increase Percentage
1 Humberside	164·5
2 Derbyshire	160·8
3 Nottinghamshire	140·4

Rates

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total proposed rate in poundage and percentage terms for every local authority in England for 1989-90.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is contained in a report "Rates and Expenditure of Local Authorities in England 1989-90" which has been placed in the Library.

Burtenshaw Farm, Bolton

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the announcement by Barratts Housebuilders of an intention to build on land at Burtenshaw farm, Bolton, which was the subject of his decision to uphold a restrictive covenant on 23 November 1988.

Mr. Trippier: The enforcement of the covenant is a matter for Bolton borough council. I understand that the council is considering what action to take.

Rents

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the rent due, excluding rates, was collected by inner London boroughs in 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Trippier: The information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Leasebacks

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the effect of section 100 leasebacks on housing investment programmes.

Mr. Trippier: Details of the treatment of housing investment programme allocation for leaseback payments under section 100 of the Housing Act 1988 appear in paragraph 22 of the Department of the Environment circular: "Tenants' Choice": The Housing (Change of Landlord) Regulations 1989 and the Housing (Change of Landlord) (Prescribed Forms) Regulations 1989. The prescribed expenditure arising from leaseback will not present a drain on the authority's housing investment programme.

Housing Transfer (Gloucester)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what authority officers of his Department phoned Gloucester district council with consent for a proposed voluntary transfer; what was the legal status of that consent; and on what grounds the valuation of the sale was changed.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 4 April 1989 at column *153*.

Housing Subsidy

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the total amount and the average per tenant of *(a)* local authority subsidy for council housing, *(b)* central Government subsidy for council housing and *(c)* housing benefit payable in respect of council tenants in (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland in 1978-79 and 1988-89 for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Trippier: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Parkinson Homes

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many privately owned Parkinson homes remain unrepaired.

Mr. Trippier: Of the 730 privately owned Parkinson houses identified by local authorities, three have been registered for repair under the PRC Homes Ltd. warranty scheme and 211 had been reported as repurchased up to 31 March 1987.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Ridley: A public information campaign on the community charge will take place in May and early June 1989. This will not involve television advertising.

Charitable Housing Associations

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he intends to give charitable housing associations on the circumstances in which they may acquire tenanted dwellings from local authorities and other public landlords.

Mr. Trippier: 1. Housing associations now have wider opportunities to acquire tenanted stock from public authorities in three ways:

- under the tenants' choice provisions of the Housing Act 1988,
- proposals by a number of local housing authorities to dispose of their dwelling stock,
- the forthcoming wind-up of the remaining new town development corporations in England.

The Department of the Environment and the Housing Corporation, in consultation with the Charity Commissioners, have prepared the following guidance for charitable housing associations with regard to the acquisition by them of tenanted housing stock.

2. The main objects of many charitable housing associations are on the following lines:

"to carry on for the benefit of the community the business of providing housing and any associated amenities for persons in necessitious circumstances upon terms appropriate to their means' and/or providing for aged persons in need thereof housing and any associated amenities specially designed or adapted to meet the disabilities and requirements of such persons".

3. This guidance relates to associations with main objects expressed in the terms set out in paragraph 2 or terms which do not depart substantially from them. However, in all cases, an association's purposes, objects and powers must be carefully considered by its governing body, if necessary seeking legal advice and advice from the commissioners, before the acquisition of tenanted stock is embarked upon. Moreover they must be construed as a whole, and a proposed acquisition must be consistent not only with the main objects and powers but also with any others there may be.

This guidance will refer to the various categories of qualifying needy or aged persons as "beneficiaries".

The purpose of the proposed acquisition

4. (i) In order to abide by the requirements both of its rules (or other governing instrument) and of general charity law, a charitable association may only purchase tenanted housing stock when it is satisfied that the acquisition will enable it to further its charitable objects and where the acquisition is capable of being regarded objectively in this way.

(ii) A charitable association is likely to have two main reasons for contemplating an acquisition of tenanted stock: to provide a better service for the existing tenants than the present, or in some circumstances some other alternative landlord; and to increase the association's ability to provide, in the longer term, for beneficiaries of the kinds specified in its objects as vacancies arise in the acquired stock. A purchase for these reasons is capable of being within the association's main objects, depending on the circumstances. If for some reason one of them does not apply in a particular case (for example if the association is not confident of being able to provide better or more efficient management for existing tenants) correspondingly greater weight would have to be attached to the other for the transaction to be comparable with the objects.

(iii) If the main reason for the acquisition of the tenanted stock is to provide vacant possession gradually

over a long period the association may to that extent also be looking at the acquisition as an investment. Accordingly, it may be considered desirable for associations contemplating the acquisition of public sector housing to ensure that their constitution allows the acquisition and holding of land as an investment.

Factors to be considered by the association in assessing a proposed acquisition

5. In assessing the compatibility of a proposed acquisition with its objects, the association's governing body will need to consider the following factors in good faith and with open minds (although the list is not intended to be exhaustive):—

(i) how the acquisition fits in with the association's policy for fulfilling its objectives. The association must consider what the purchase is really likely to achieve for present and future beneficiaries, and whether it is an effective use of money and manpower which might otherwise be used elsewhere;

(ii) the proportion of non-beneficiaries to the existing tenants as a whole. This will be a major factor. It is impossible to lay down a maximum acceptable percentage, because circumstances will vary too much from case to case, but beneficiaries should normally be a substantial majority;

(iii) the extent to which the association may pick and choose particular dwellings within the portfolio on offer, and, conversely, the extent to which this might lead to difficult or inefficient management or other disadvantages to the beneficiaries. Where the portfolio on offer contains a substantial number of dwellings occupied by those who do not qualify as beneficiaries, the association may want to see if some or all of them can be excluded from the purchase. However, the vendor will not always be prepared to sell on this basis and there may in any event by management or social considerations which would make acquisition only of selected properties relatively disadvantageous to the beneficiaries;

(iv) the expected rate of turn-over of non-beneficiary tenants. The higher the proportion of non-beneficiary tenants, the more important this will be. But the rate of turnover of beneficiary tenants may also be important if one of the reasons for the purchase was to get long-term access to vacant housing stock.

(v) the opportunity to buy on advantageous terms. These transactions will normally take place not at unrestricted market value but at a lower "tenanted market value" assuming, among other things, that the dwellings will generally be kept available for letting and that rents will be kept down to levels within the reach of the lower paid.

The preserved right to buy and other rights of tenants

6. Existing tenants taken over from the public sector may have a preserved right to buy under section 171 A to 171 H of the Housing Act 1985 and section 127 of the Housing Act 1988. The association will need to take this factor into account, (and indeed the rights of or attributable to sitting tenants more generally, including security of tenure and a surviving spouse's right of succession) in considering how far the acquisition will enable it to provide for beneficiaries in the longer term (though these matters may of course be reflected in the purchase price). The right to buy might be disadvantageous if the association wanted a portfolio of properties as an integrated whole, to be kept intact as long-term housing stock for present and future beneficiaries, and the association would have to consider how far its plans might be undermined by some tenants exercising their right to buy. But the fact that existing tenants, beneficiaries or non-beneficiaries, will have statutory rights including the right to buy does not of itself make the purchase inconsistent with the association's charitable objects.

Bathing Water

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Norwich, South on 6 April, *Official Report*, column *281*, concerning bathing water standards which are the responsibility of the Anglian water authority, what steps he proposes to require the authority to report on breaches of the European Economic Community guide and mandatory levels for pollutants which are not recorded in its report in the Library.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* I am satisfied that the Anglian water authority is correctly fulfilling its sampling and reporting requirements under the EEC bathing water directive.

Urban Programme (Stockton)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, how much is being spent in the parliamentary constituency of Stockton, South under the urban programme; and on what schemes it is being spent.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 18 April 1989]*: The current anticipated spend on the eight approved projects located in the Stockton, South constituency from the inner area programme of Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees borough councils for the 1989-90 financial year is £258,400. One further scheme valued at £13,000 is subject to discussion between the Department and Stockton-on-Tees borough council. The schemes are listed below:—

	£
Security/Environment Grants to Industry	52,500
Thornaby Impasse	4,200
Riverside Stockton Landscaping	500
Neighbourhood Worker, Thornaby	16,200
CEDEMP Mobility Centre Test Track	61,000
Neighbourhood Management and Community Resource Centre	42,000
Whinney Banks Site 6	62,000
Street Lighting Whinney Banks	20,000
	258,400

In addition, the Stockton, South constituency will benefit, directly or indirectly, from a number of boroughwide projects totalling £306,545. Again, this figure could increase by a further £50,300 depending upon the outcome of forthcoming discussions between the Department and Stockton-on-Tees borough council.

Water Charges

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average percentage increase in water charge for 1989-90 announced by the statutory water companies in England; and if he will list the percentage increase announced by each company in descending order of magnitude.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* I gave an estimate of the average increase in water company charges

in my reply on March 14 to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel), *Official Report*, Vol. 149, column *211*.

The detailed information requested by my right hon. Friend is not yet available. I will publish a list when returns now being received by the Department have been analysed.

Local Authorities (Businesses)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all local authorities which operate businesses themselves in competition with the private sector and the nature of each business concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* This information is not held centrally.

Development Decisions (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which London boroughs currently supply his Department with information about development decisions in London; which boroughs do not; and what steps he is taking to ensure that all boroughs supply the information necessary for his proposed development monitoring system in London.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Enfield, Haringey, Lewisham, Sutton and Waltham Forest are the only London boroughs which do not regularly provide the Department with information about development decisions. Officials are in communication with those boroughs in an effort to encourage them to provide the information.

The Department has set up a pilot study with the London planning advisory committee into establishing a development monitoring system with the co-operation of all the boroughs.

Business Development (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria he will use to decide whether London boroughs have made adequate provision in their unitary development plans for business development.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* The criteria used to judge whether adequate provision has been made will vary according to the individual circumstances and needs of the borough drawing up the UDP.

Local Authorities (Finance)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to restrict the access of local authorities to private financial markets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Clause 34 of the Local Government and Housing Bill provides that, where local authorities are authorised to borrow money, they will be able to do so by borrowing from authorised banking institutions, from the National Debt Commissioners or the Public Works Loan Commissioners, from the private sector by means of loan instruments as defined in subsection 34(4), or, with the consent of my right hon. Friend, by other means. It would be for the authorities to decide which of these means to use.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 20 April 1989

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Gibraltar (Incident)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether the Spanish Government informed the British authorities that the Renault car parked at Main street, Gibraltar, on 6 March 1988, was followed by surveillance officers of the Spanish authorities to the frontier of Gibraltar on 6 March; and if it was then followed by British authorities until it was parked;

(2) whether the Spanish authorities have confirmed to him the statements of Tomaz Rayo Valenzuela and Manuel Gimenez that the Spanish police discovered D. McCann and S. Savage staying at the hotel Escandinavia, Torremolinos, on 5 March 1988 and informed the British authorities;

(3) why the Spanish police were requested not to follow D. McCann and S. Savage on 6 March 1988.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the statement given by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Trefgarne in another place on 1 March at column 1124.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Payments (Interest)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why the Inland Revenue charge a higher interest rate on moneys owed to it by taxpayers than the rate that it applies to moneys repaid by it to taxpayers.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The present rates of interest charged by the Inland Revenue on unpaid tax and paid on overpaid tax are the same (11·5 per cent.).

Workplace Nurseries

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to *(a)* the number of employers involved in, and *(b)* the total annual cost to the Exchequer of, the current take-up of relief available for the establishment of workplace nurseries by employers, under (i) the 4 per cent. per annum relief scheme and (ii) the special provision for enterprise zones.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that this information is not available centrally.

P11D Form (Limit)

Mr. Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to raise the limit for the P11D form and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There are no plans to do so.

Mr. Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the limit for the P11D form was raised to £8,500; and what would be the equivalent figure in current monetary terms.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Employees whose earnings, including the value of benefits, are at a rate of £8,500 or more per year are liable to tax on benefits in kind. All directors are liable regardless of the level of earnings. The earnings threshold—also known as the P11D limit—was set at £8,500 in 1979-80 and, if it had been indexed in line with inflation according to the statutory formula for increasing personal allowances and thresholds, the threshold in 1989-90 would be £18,100.

Mr. Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy towards indexing the limit for the P11D form in line with inflation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Government have at no time sought to increase the threshold at which employees pay tax on benefits in kind, since in principle all employees should pay income tax on the whole of their earnings whether received in cash or in kind.

Mr. Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers currently receive dispensation from the Inland Revenue from completing the P11D form; and how many employees benefit from such dispensations.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that, at December 1988, about 23,000 employers had dispensations from reporting employees' expenses payments on forms P11D, an increase of 29 per cent. on the number at October 1987. When a dispensation exists in relation to expenses payments P11Ds may still need to be completed in relation to benefits in kind.

The number of employees covered by dispensations in 1985-86 is estimated to be about 2·7 million. Figures for later years are not yet available but, as there has been a substantial increase in employers receiving dispensations, it is estimated that over 3 million employees are now covered by them.

Student Covenants

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received, since 15 March 1988, about the withdrawal of tax relief on increases in parental contributions to covenants for students; whether he plans any changes in these arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Treasury Ministers have received some 200 representations about various aspects of the changes introduced last year to the tax treatment of student covenants. No separate record has been kept of those which relate to increases in parental contributions for students.

We have no plans to make any further changes in the tax treatment of student covenants. The changes which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced last year greatly simplify an unnecessarily complex part of the tax system.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to reform or abolish stamp duty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer, 19 April 1989]:* In my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent Budget he proposed both to abolish stamp duty on life policies and to adapt the charge on share transfers to forthcoming developments in methods of share dealing.

Premium Bonds

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the money taken by the purchase of premium bonds is spent on *(a)* administration and *(b)* prize money.

Mr. Lilley *[pursuant to his reply 7 March 1989 c. 493]:* I regret that there was an error in the reply. Premium bond prize money is a charge on the National Loans Fund not the Consolidated Fund.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Land Registry

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Attorney-General what steps the Lord Chancellor is taking to reduce the risk of mortgage fraud arising from delays in the Land Registry; what is the current backlog; what is his target for the interval between receipt and completion of inquiries; when he expects this to be achieved; and how long he plans to maintain that performance once achieved.

The Attorney-General: There does not appear to be any evidence that mortgage fraud occurs because of delays in completing applications at the Land Registry. Such frauds occur in areas of the conveyancing process with which the Land Registry is not directly involved.

The Land Registry has target completion times of 14 weeks for first registrations, 12 weeks for dealings with part of the land in a title and four weeks for dealings with the whole title. The present backlog of applications which have not been dealt with within these target completion times is 586,000.

The targets referred to will be achieved within the next year if activity levels in the property and financial markets do not increase. Once they are achieved the chief land registrar will look to improve the service further.

Magistrates (Advisory Committees)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Attorney-General on what criteria the Lord Chancellor chose 1992 as the date by which local advisory committees on appointing magistrates should make their membership publicly known.

The Attorney-General: Advisory committees are reconstituted every three years. By the end of 1992 any serving members who do not wish their names to be disclosed will have had an opportunity to retire.

ENERGY

Power Stations (Applications)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy not to consider future applications for power stations until after negotiations with affected local authorities have taken place.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Present legislation provides for the relevant planning authorities to be consulted about such applications when they are made. Similar provision is made in the Electricity Bill currently before Parliament.

Furthermore, I understand that it is normal practice for an applicant to discuss a proposed development informally with the planning authorities before submitting his application to my right hon. Friend.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Parkinson: My Department owns no such properties.

Plutonium

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *373*, he will state the error limits allowed in calculating the amount of plutonium produced by British civil nuclear power stations in the year ended 31 March 1988;

(2) what criteria his Department uses in allowing error limits to be set for the calculations of the amount of plutonium generated by British civil nuclear power stations.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department does not set specific error limits in the calculation of plutonium content, but expects the operators to achieve the highest possible accuracy in their estimates.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the population figures within a 100-mile radius for each nuclear power station in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Most of the population of the United Kingdom live within a 100-mile radius of a nuclear power station.

NORTHERN IRELAND

EC Funding

10. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on additionality with respect to European Community funding as it applies to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ian Stewart: We shall adhere to the additionality conditions included in the new regulation co-ordinating the EC's three structural funds.

Student Loans

12. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the number of representations he has received for and against the Government's students loan plan.

Dr. Mawhinney: Representations expressing a variety of views have been received from four Members of Parliament, two district councils, the Fair Employment Agency, local representatives of the National Union of Students and other student bodies.

13. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he had received any representations from banking institutions in the last month with regard to the proposed introduction of student loans; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Devolved Government

14. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he is taking action to secure devolved government in Northern Ireland, either within or outside the framework of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Tom King: We are exploring the possibilities for political movement. I would not at this stage try to draw any conclusions from these exploratory discussions, which are still in progress, though all the main political parties have said they support devolution. I hope that responsible political leaders and interested groups will take this opportunity to convey their views on these important matters and they can do it either within or outside the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Security

15. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the security situation.

23. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the security position in Northern Ireland.

22. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Tom King: Since 9 March, 10 people have died in incidents arising from the security situation. These deaths included two senior police officers, one UDR soldier and seven civilians. They also included the murder of a young girl killed by a bomb planted by the Provisional IRA without warning in Warrenpoint on 12 April. Thirty people were also injured in this appalling attack. The Provisional IRA claimed responsibility for five of these murders, whilst Loyalist paramilitary organisations are believed to have been responsible for the other five.

The resolute efforts of the security forces have resulted in 74 people being charged with serious offences, including 12 with murder and 13 with attempted murder since the beginning of the year. A total of 123 weapons, over 14,500 rounds of ammunition and 215 lb of explosives have been recovered in Northern Ireland. I understand that the Garda Siochana has recovered 39 weapons, 11,500 rounds of ammunition, and 230 lb of explosives.

Education and Library Boards

16. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives from the education and library boards in Northern Ireland; and what was discussed.

Dr. Mawhinney: I met a deputation from the Association of Education and Library Boards on 21 March 1989 when resolutions adopted at the association's 1988 annual meeting were presented and discussed.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

17. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Tom King: Work is continuing on the review under article 11 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of the working of the intergovernmental conference. It is intended that the review be concluded, and the results made public, at the next meeting of the conference to be held in a few weeks.

Touring Arts Companies

18. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to encourage the exchange of touring arts companies between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Dr. Mawhinney: There has been, and continues to be, a healthy exchange of touring arts companies between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. The Government, however, are not directly involved in these arrangements. In Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, the support of artistic ventures is the responsibility of the Arts Council and the council and the arts organisations themselves encourage and arrange tours by individual artists and companies to and from Northern Ireland.

Prisoners (Release)

19. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the system for fixing release dates for prisoners serving sentences of indeterminate length.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton).

Republic of Ireland

20. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next proposes to have discussions with Ministers of the Government of the Republic of Ireland; and what matters he will discuss.

Mr. Tom King: I last met Irish Ministers on 5 April. No firm date has yet been announced for the next meeting of the conference, but I expect this to be done quite soon.

Taoiseach

21. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Tom King: I last met the Taoiseach in Dublin on 13 September prior to the intergovernmental conference on that day. The subjects discussed are confidential. I meet the deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Lenihan, regularly in the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Community Policing (North Down)

24. **Mr. Kilfedder:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide more funds to the Royal Ulster Constabulary to enable community policing in the North Down area to be fully restored.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Police Authority grant for 1989-90 is £415 million. This represents an increase of some £30 million over the previous year. It is primarily the responsibility of the Chief Constable and the Police Authority to determine priorities and allocate resources.

Health and Social Services Boards

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives from the health and social services boards in Northern Ireland; and what was discussed.

Mr. Needham: I met board representatives on 23 March. We discussed the proposals in the White Paper "Working for Patients".

Slaughtering and Meat Trading

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to introduce legislation to bring Northern Ireland into line with Great Britain regarding illegal slaughtering and unfit meat trading.

Mr. Needham: Northern Ireland legislation on the slaughter of animals is already in line with Great Britain. Legislation governing trade in unfit meat is in line with England and Wales, but differs from Scotland. The Department of Health and Social Services is currently considering whether the Northern Ireland law on unfit meat should be improved by including some provisions equivalent to those applying in Scotland.

Live Fish (Transport)

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate the exact procedure used and documentation required to transport live fish in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The movement of live fish, ova and fry requires a permit issued under section 14 of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966. Permits may be obtained by making application to fisheries division, Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland, Castle buildings, Stormont, Belfast.

Terrorism

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were arrested, detained and subsequently released without charge under section 12 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in each of the years from 1984 to 1988.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information is as follows:

Persons detained under Section 12 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Persons Arrested/ Detained	908	938	1,309	1,459	1,717
Persons released without charge	650	691	951	[1]1,116	[1]1,344

[1] Includes one person not charged with an offence but excluded under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

Medical and Nursing Profession

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives from the medical and nursing profession in Northern Ireland; and what was discussed.

Mr. Needham: I have discussed "Working for Patients" with a variety of interests including representatives of the medical, nursing and management professions and members of health and social services boards and I will be meeting several more delegations shortly.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the use of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Plastic baton rounds are used by the security forces in Northern Ireland only when their use is judged to be the minimum and reasonable amount of force necessary to protect life, property and to prevent serious crime. In certain circumstances, particularly during vicious and widespread rioting when lives are put seriously at risk, the use of plastic baton rounds is the most effective way of restoring order. This method of riot control is designed to ensure that the risk of injury or death is kept to a minimum.

Harland and Wolff

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to discuss the question of state subsidies with representatives of Harland and Wolff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: I have no plans to discuss the question of state subsidies with representatives of Harland and Wolff. I can confirm, however, that following the signing of the heads of agreement discussions between my officials and the MEBO/Olsen team are continuing.

Comptroller and Auditor-General

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made to appoint a new Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Tom King: Her Majesty the Queen has graciously approved the appointment of Dr. W. H. Jack CB, former permanent secretary at the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland, to this office in succession to L.V.D. Calvert CB who is retiring.

Young People

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider reintroducing income support to 16 and 17-year-olds who do not receive an offer of a YTS place at the termination of their period of bridging allowance or extended child benefit.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* In line with the policy of maintaining parity in social security provision, the rules for paying income support to 16 and 17-year-olds in Northern Ireland are kept in line with those for the rest of the United Kingdom. At present income support is payable under the normal rules to a number of 16 and 17-year-olds, for example, if they are incapable of work or have a child. Claims for income support under the "severe hardship" provision will be considered from any 16 or 17-year-old who is actively pursuing a place in the youth training programme.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many 16 and 17-year-olds who remain unemployed after the ending of the bridging allowance payments or extended child benefit (1) applied for severe hardship grants from the social fund or (2) received severe hardship grants from the social fund for each month, October 1988 to March 1989, inclusive.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* Severe hardship payments are made under the income support scheme rather than the social fund and the available information is set out in the table below:

Income support severe hardship applications

	Applications received	*Admitted for payment*
October 1988	2	2
November 1988	3	2
December 1988	7	5
January 1989	5	5
February 1989	7	6
March 1989	13	11

EMPLOYMENT

Public Service Broadcasts

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will assess the likely implications of the transmission by Channel 4 of public service broadcasts emanating from his Department of the White Paper "Broadcasting in the 90s: Competition, Choice and Quality".

Mr. Cope: There is no reason to suppose that the proposals in the White Paper will alter the present arrangements whereby public service messages are broadcast by Channel 4.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Cope: The Employment Department group has title, either freehold or leasehold, to 36 residential properties. Of these, one flat in Morden, Surrey has been vacant for more than a year, while major repairs and refurbishment works are carried out. Two houses associated with Letchworth skillcentre, and intended for keyworker staff, have been unoccupied since December 1988.

Sky Television (Work Permits)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when his Department received applications for work permits from Mr. Pat Mastandrea amd Mr. Gary Davey of Sky Television; if the applications were successful; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Details of work permit applications are confidential between this Department and the applicant's employer or his accredited representative.

Foreigners (Employment)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria have to be satisfied before a non-EC national can obtain employment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: Work permits are issued in respect of a specific post. In general work permits for normal employment are granted only in respect of jobs requiring professional qualifications or administrative, executive or high technical skills for which suitable resident labour is not available. The pay and conditions offered should be at least as good as those offered in the area for similar work and the overseas worker should normally be aged between 23 and 54 years.

Workfare

92. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received on the subject of workfare schemes.

Mr. Lee *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* My right hon. Friend receives, from time to time, representations both for and against the introduction of a workfare scheme in this country.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for his Department and the Training Agency, respectively, or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* The current publicity campaigns and those planned by my Department for the first three months of 1989-90 are as follows:

Employment Department Group Publicity Campaigns

The Training Agency	*Start Date*	*Finish Date*	
Small Firms Service	April 1 1989	March 31 1990 (on going basis)	No television advertising
National Training Awards	March 20 1989	April 23 1989	No television advertising
Business growth Training	April 12 1989	December 1989	No television advertising
Open Learning	May 2 1989	May 20 1989	No television advertising
Employment Training	May 17 1989	July 2 1989	Including Television advertising
Tourism Training	March 6 1989	May 6 1989	No television advertising
YTS	April 17 1989	May 14 1989	Including Television advertising
Health and Safety Executive	March 6 1989	August 1989	No television advertising

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

West Bank and Gaza Strip

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the present aid projects funded by his Department in the west bank and the Gaza strip; what have been the projects so aided in each of the preceding five years; and what has been the cost of each.

Mr. Chris Patten: Over the past five years the Overseas Development Administration's bilateral assistance to the west bank and Gaza has been provided through contributions to projects undertaken by British non-governmental organisations; by training awards for Palestinians to study in Britain; and by book presentations to educational institutions. Details are as follows:

	£	
NGO Projects		
Order of St. John		
Outreach programme based on St. John opthalmic hospital	450,000	(1984-85)
Support for surgery, nurses training, clinical trials	80,000	(1987-88)
Oxfam		
Mennonite central committee land reclamation and water system construction	24,539	(1988)
Bethlehem arab society for the physically handicapped	26,703	(1988-90)
Annahda womens association centre for the mentally handicapped	17,800	(1988)
Oxfam (ex-progressive action for childhood education)		
Early childhood resource centre	63,042	(1986-89)
Quaker peace and service		
Middle East placement programme	38,194	(1985-88)
Action around Bethlehem, children with disability		
Water catchment project	23,800	(1987-88)
Solar energy project	31,300	(1987-88)
Save the children fund		
Resource centre	57,000	(1988-90)
Physiotherapy training	72,975	(1988-91)
Rafah sewerage project	44,600	(1987)
Cooperation for development		
Small enterprise revolving credit funding programme	576,700	(1987-88)
Women's education and training programme	45,550	(1985-88)
Gaza enterprise training scheme	28,816	(1987-88)
Universities educational fund for Palestinian refugees (UNIPAL)		
English language teaching project	37,000	(1984-89)
War on want		
Zabadeh early childhood resource centre	58,636	(1988-89)
Abasan biscuit factory project	20,920	(1988)
Appropriate health resources technologies group (AHRTAG)		
Bir Zeit community health unit	6,348	(1988)
Y care international		
Relief for victims of the uprising, dependants, and training	53,000	(1987-89)
British Red Cross-ICRC		
Provision of tents for emergency housing	38,000	(1988)
World vision of Europe		
Emergency relief to dependants of victims of the uprising	24,000	(1988)

Requests from NGOs for additional funds amounting to over £1 million are under consideration.

1984-85 £	*1985-86* £	*1986-87* £	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £
Training programme				
65,000	110,000	127,000	285,000	165,000
Book presentation programme				
5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000

The United Kingdom also provides support through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. In each year from 1984 to 1987 £5 million was contributed directly, increasing to £5·2 million in 1988. £5·5 million is being provided in 1989.

The United Kingdom contributes to the European Community programme for the west bank and Gaza. In 1987 and 1988 about £0·4 million a year was attributable to the United Kingdom. Of the Community's contribution to UNRWA about £3 million in each of the two years was attributable to the United Kingdom.

WALES

Agricultural Pollution

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farms in Wales were visited by his staff and advised about methods of controlling agricultural pollution in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information on the number of farms visited to provide advice on pollution control is not available. The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service takes every opportunity to discuss pollution control measures in the course of farm visits made for other purposes, and provides advice free.

Human Rights

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights in Wales; and which organisations made these representations.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information is not available. The question of human rights can be interpreted as covering an extremely wide range of issues for which my Department is responsible. Some representations received from both organisations and individuals, may raise allegations of denials of human rights. No central record is kept of such representations or of the organisations making them.

Teachers' Salaries

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how teacher salary costs are calculated in Wales for the local management formula for primary schools in the calculation of school budgets.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Under local management of schools primary schools budgets will be determined by a formula based largely on age-weighted pupil numbers. At least 75 per cent. of the resources so distributed must be in proportion to age-weighted pupil numbers. In deciding how heavily to weight each age of pupils, LEAs will need to make assumptions about teaching costs for each age group. These assumptions will be based on average teacher salaries. However, Welsh Office circular 36/88 recognises that in the case of small schools there may be variations between the actual teaching costs and the LEA's average costs, due to teachers' position on the main scale and the incidence of salary safeguarding. LEAs may therefore adjust schools' budgets to reflect this factor. In general, however, the degree of protection should be tapered according to the size of school, so that budget shares of larger schools are not adjusted.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information is as follows:

	(a) Women		*(b) Members of ethnic minorities*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Grade 1	—	—	—	—
Grade 2	—	—	—	—
Grade 3	—	—	—	—
Grade 4	1	20·0	—	—
Grade 5	5½	10·0	—	—
Grade 6	17½	19·0	1	1·0
Grade 7	13	9·5	1	0·7
Department total	987	46·0	20	0·9

Notes:
1. As at 1 January 1989.
2. The grade categories shown include equivalent professional grades.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department carried out a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees in May 1988. The ethnic origin of all new entrants is known and I have no present plans for another survey.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department is an equal opportunity employer. It gives equal consideration, regardless of colour, race, ethnic or national origins, to all candidates in its promotion and recruitment procedures. This applies to all levels of management.

Local Government Staff

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were *(a)* working in local government in Wales, and *(b)* working in the different occupational categories in local government in Wales in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is published in table 47 of "Welsh Local Governmental Financial Statistics No. 12, 1988", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Water Industry Staff

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were working in the water industry in Wales in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Grist: The number of people working in the water industry in Wales is not available in the exact form requested. Figures are available for the Welsh water authority's area of supply and those people employed by the Wrexham and East Denbighshire water company and the Chester water company. These are detailed in the following table:

Manpower (Full-time equivalent employees as at 31 March 1988)

	Welsh water authority	*Wrexham and East Denbighshire*	*Chester Waterworks Company*
1979	5,594	150	89
1985	4,709	131	85
1986	4,746	121	84
1987	4,845	119	80
1988	4,618	113	78

Education (Staff)

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were working *(a)* in education and *(b)* the different occupational categories in education in Wales in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information for the maintained sector is given in "Welsh Local Government Financial

Statistics, No. 12, 1988" (table 47) copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Directly comparable figures for the independent sector are not available.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were working *(a)* in the Welsh Office, and *(b)* in the different occupational categories in the Welsh Office in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Peter Walker: The number of permanent staff working in my Department in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year and their occupational categories are set out in the following table. Direct comparisons between individual occupational categories after 1986 are however not possible since in following years they were affected by changes arising from the introduction of unified grading and the expansion of the open structure.

Year	*Senior open structure*	*Administration and clerical*	*Professional grades*	*Support grades*	*Industrial grades*	*Total*
1979	17	1,596·0	345·5	472·5	168·0	2,599
1985	13	1,432·0	297·5	399·0	127·5	2,269
1986	14	1,471·5	288·5	388·5	120·5	2,283

Year	*Senior open structure*	*Open structure*	*Administration and clerical*	*Professional grades*	*Support grades*	*Industrial grades*	*Total*
1987	17	232·0	1,319·5	170·5	387·0	119·0	2,245
1988	17	235·5	1,312·0	166·0	359·5	114·0	2,204
1989	17	229·5	1,298·5	164·5	349·0	107·5	2,166

Baglan Road

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the design load of that part of the road from Baglan to the point of the road over the bridge at the roundabout for Swansea or Carmarthen; and whether it has been exceeded in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The existing road is heavily loaded, but no single traffic-capacity figure is available since that depends on many factors, especially junctions. Delays tend to occur particularly at peak periods at Baglan roundabout, but work will start shortly on a scheme to alleviate this. Further relief will be achieved with the completion of the final section of the M4 in 1994.

Bathing Water

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sewerage outfalls from Wales into the Bristol channel, together with industrial discharges; and whether he has made any assessment of how many more outlets can be allowed before the water quality off south Wales and north Devon would require the European Community to take legal action over the failure of many beaches to meet European Community bathing water standards.

Mr. Grist: Sewerage outfalls from Wales direct to the Bristol channel are listed in the following table. Information on industrial discharges, which are the responsibility of the Welsh water authority, is not centrally available.

Cardiff Western	Baglan
Barry East New	Mumbles Head
Barry West Town	Bishopston
Rhoose East	Southgate
Rhoose West	Oxwich
West Aberthaw	Overton
Llantwit Major	Rhossili
Penybont	Saundersfoot
Newton Point	Tenby
Irongate	Manorbier
Afan	Stackpole

No such assessment as suggested by my hon. Friend is needed. I refer him to my reply of 10 April at column *382*.

Red Kites

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many red kites have been found dead in mid-Wales during each of the past three years; what has been the cause of death in each case; and how many prosecutions for the use of illegal poison have been taken out in the same period.

Mr. Grist: The Department is involved only if red kites are suspected of dying from pesticide poisoning. In 1986, there were three such incidents in mid-Wales, each involving one red kite. In one case the cause of death was not established. In the other two cases the insecticide Fenthion was indentified as the cause of death and although circumstances suggested its illegal use as a poison, this could not be cofirmed. There were no cases recorded in 1987 or 1988. So far this year there have been two incidents involving two and four birds respectively and these cases are still under investigation. There have been no prosecutions in Wales for illegal poisoning of red kites since the beginning of 1986.

Post-Chernobyl Restrictions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of farms, number of sheep and number of acres subject of post-Chernobyl restrictions as at February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Approximately 416 holdings, 300,000 sheep and 210,000 acres. Restrictions will be lifted as soon as it is possible to do so without compromising food safety.

Housing

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list *(a)* the number of dwellings owned, *(b)* the number of dwellings built, *(c)* the number of dwellings sold and *(d)* the number of dwellings purchased from the private sector, in each year since 1980 by each housing authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The information requested is given in the following tables:

(a) Estimates of local authority or New Town owned stock at 1 April[1]

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Aberconwy	4,020	4,151	3,718	3,420	3,450	3,270	3,227	3,139
Alyn and Deeside	6,135	5,944	5,730	5,647	5,658	5,619	5,573	5,503
Arfon	5,998	5,979	5,643	5,515	5,422	5,358	5,304	5,237
Blaenau Gwent	11,405	11,673	11,629	11,629	11,301	11,123	11,012	10,871
Brecknock	3,838	3,894	3,509	3,337	3,264	3,172	3,095	3,019
Cardiff	24,600	25,238	25,009	23,644	23,408	23,189	22,551	21,776
Carmarthen	4,142	4,116	3,926	3,827	3,818	3,779	3,740	3,711
Ceredigion	4,122	4,119	3,954	3,751	3,786	3,758	3,700	3,662
Colwyn	3,128	3,143	3,092	3,010	2,998	2,939	2,877	2,821
Cynon Valley	6,371	6,521	6,217	5,815	5,804	5,763	5,699	5,596
Delyn	6,193	5,896	5,519	5,285	5,252	5,161	5,088	4,992
Dinefwr	3,035	3,104	3,005	2,880	2,821	2,846	2,795	2,755
Dwyfor	1,681	1,710	1,634	1,562	1,535	1,510	1,490	1,484
Glyndwr	3,969	3,977	3,801	3,501	3,419	3,343	3,284	3,217
Islwyn	8,988	9,070	8,804	7,468	7,148	7,003	6,858	6,667
Llanelli	9,516	9,504	9,010	8,375	8,009	7,702	7,626	7,529
Lliw Valley	6,020	6,210	6,065	5,651	5,607	5,536	5,547	5,458
Meirionnydd	2,687	2,732	2,669	2,388	2,362	2,320	2,259	2,203
Merthyr Tydfil	8,389	8,619	8,356	7,952	7,808	7,695	7,541	7,357
Monmouth	6,282	6,034	5,943	5,641	5,567	5,452	5,388	5,351
Montgomery[2]	5,085	5,248	4,928	4,688	4,575	4,624	4,626	4,503
Neath	7,454	7,560	7,014	6,660	6,508	6,385	6,190	6,096
Newport	15,711	15,685	15,357	14,989	14,507	14,340	14,020	13,839
Ogwr	12,916	13,087	12,820	11,769	11,376	11,141	10,892	10,613
Port Talbot (Afan)	9,042	9,014	8,782	8,260	7,682	7,381	7,115	6,834
Preseli	7,327	7,335	6,783	6,544	6,377	6,278	6,286	6,200
Radnor	1,519	1,548	1,459	1,370	1,281	1,286	1,268	1,262
Rhondda	5,255	5,428	5,395	5,240	5,217	5,291	5,234	5,153
Rhuddlan	3,131	3,201	3,097	3,016	2,900	2,897	2,907	2,905
Rhymney Valley	12,635	12,895	12,378	11,667	11,292	11,089	10,920	10,641
South Pembrokeshire	3,677	3,635	3,487	3,348	3,216	3,166	3,112	3,072
Swansea	19,863	19,996	19,630	19,261	19,164	19,048	18,788	18,554
Taff-Ely	10,066	10,058	9,815	9,405	9,198	8,932	8,609	8,356
Torfaen[3]	18,496	19,014	17,589	16,074	15,524	15,092	14,787	14,559
Vale of Glamorgan	8,693	8,405	8,074	7,701	7,449	7,203	7,105	6,927
Wrexham Maelor	17,949	18,060	17,556	17,125	17,017	16,941	16,857	16,666
Ynys Môn	6,455	6,659	6,397	6,196	6,155	6,180	6,087	6,037
WALES	295,793	298,462	287,794	273,611	267,875	263,812	259,457	254,565

[1] Estimates for the years 1981 to 1985 have been revised since previous publication.
[2] Includes New Town dwellings in Newtown.
[3] Includes New Town dwellings in Cwmbran.

(b) Number of dwellings built by local authorities or New Towns

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Aberconwy	104	19	0	38	0	20	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	35	35	58	78	39	30	33	49
Arfon	17	29	40	0	34	3	0	18
Blaenau Gwent	230	291	60	0	73	5	0	27
Brecknock	40	0	36	32	0	12	0	25
Cardiff	482	368	213	273	353	48	0	6
Carmarthen	85	57	80	91	65	6	35	26
Ceredigion	90	81	76	64	101	0	41	43
Colwyn	126	40	0	50	24	0	18	0
Cynon Valley	24	0	14	0	40	0	0	25
Delyn	48	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
Dinefwr	57	42	17	7	71	0	34	32
Dwyfor	17	16	6	5	0	9	4	0
Glyndwr	27	102	51	13	0	0	0	0
Islwyn	26	119	44	55	34	21	40	64
Llanelli	58	54	44	24	0	67	73	37
Lliw Valley	155	150	40	88	115	11	34	33
Meirionnydd	38	45	37	12	12	0	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	228	96	12	11	5	0	0	4
Monmouth	93	86	0	101	99	38	74	15
Montgomery[1]	53	99	67	8	95	48	16	26
Neath	73	40	26	57	68	16	28	38
Newport	167	282	83	54	154	93	93	97
Ogwr	140	218	46	22	77	109	44	55
Port Talbot (Afan)	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0
Preseli	64	17	0	0	0	0	11	39
Radnor	30	20	20	31	38	10	14	0
Rhondda	155	132	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rhuddlan	57	31	59	20	51	24	44	41
Rhymney Valley	183	97	56	107	51	37	0	0

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
South Pembrokeshire	41	0	0	6	21	0	0	0
Swansea	58	93	116	20	94	57	15	14
Taff-Ely	173	86	69	124	39	0	32	50
Torfaen[2]	274	176	121	213	199	44	106	20
Vale of Glamorgan	119	74	73	0	38	0	36	3
Wrexham Maelor	40	104	69	62	61	70	7	35
Ynys Môn	200	62	36	35	91	20	25	22
WALES	3,807	3,185	1,676	1,701	2,142	798	857	864

[1] Includes New Town dwellings in Newtown.
[2] Includes New Town dwellings in Cwmbran.

(c) Number of dwellings sold by local authorities or New Towns

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Aberconwy	0	297	400	145	84	82	87	81
Alyn and Deeside	253	225	141	73	65	76	103	137
Arfon	4	357	176	112	93	65	72	63
Blaenau Gwent	9	340	323	160	92	108	153	171
Brecknock	0	396	152	120	108	90	99	92
Cardiff	11	475	1,604	651	566	611	775	591
Carmarthen	123	263	167	103	102	59	74	79
Ceredigion	54	221	258	128	83	57	79	74
Colwyn	75	97	77	67	54	66	74	75
Cynon Valley	0	249	317	104	90	76	103	124
Delyn	358	326	256	76	55	65	96	129
Dinefwr	0	128	140	64	44	52	74	76
Dwyfor	0	85	80	37	23	27	15	13
Glyndwr	4	229	285	99	75	63	67	63
Islwyn	0	326	1,304	405	212	175	233	263
Llanelli	31	618	530	479	293	159	171	206
Lliw Valley	0	278	447	123	79	117	129	145
Meirionnydd	0	116	227	109	61	57	56	52
Merthyr Tydfil	0	317	387	165	115	167	185	216
Monmouth	147	240	251	181	166	140	129	193
Montgomery[1]	0	414	267	120	74	84	133	155
Neath	4	603	361	125	123	124	146	200
Newport	98	628	489	414	355	341	275	277
Ogwr	0	440	1,073	401	348	318	325	382
Port Talbot (Afan)	14	231	537	521	293	280	281	295
Preseli	33	570	281	158	111	104	100	122
Radnor	0	112	114	94	29	28	23	45
Rhondda	0	127	65	40	22	55	81	59
Rhuddlan	3	120	139	129	61	30	46	85
Rhymney Valley	1	530	820	383	246	196	274	260
South Pembrokeshire	99	62	134	136	55	45	40	67
Swansea	17	336	468	219	156	207	254	381
Taff-Ely	15	452	457	462	261	266	293	377
Torfaen[2]	331	1,072	1,561	741	694	486	334	317
Vale of Glamorgan	452	370	422	298	212	207	223	195
Wrexham Maelor	0	530	497	161	138	154	199	188
Ynys Môn	0	277	270	89	57	96	75	65
WALES	2,136	12,457	15,477	7,892	5,695	5,333	5,876	6,313

[1] Includes sales of New Town dwellings in Newtown.
[2] Includes sales of New Town dwellings in Cwmbran.

(d) Number of dwellings purchased by local authorities or New Towns[1]

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Aberconwy	0	0	1	1	2	4	0	2
Alyn and Deeside	0	2	6	5	2	3	0	0
Arfon	7	0	3	11	2	5	5	2
Blaenau Gwent	0	0	2	2	0	0	12	22
Brecknock	0	0	0	0	0	3	14	15
Cardiff	0	1	0	1	0	3	4	3
Carmarthen	5	1	1	2	7	3	11	3
Ceredigion	0	1	0	4	2	2	0	0
Colwyn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cynon Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Delyn	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
Dinefwr	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Dwyfor	2	0	1	4	1	4	5	7
Glyndwr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Islwyn	0	0	0	2	0	4	2	2
Llanelli	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lliw Valley	0	0	2	0	0	0	6	5

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Meirionnydd	7	1	1	4	2	0	0	2
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	0	0	0	0	62	0
Monmouth	0	0	0	0	0	6	18	12
Montgomery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Neath	3	8	9	9	1	22	29	25
Newport	19	19	2	2	1	61	68	40
Ogwr	0	0	1	2	2	16	21	47
Port Talbot (Afan)	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Preseli	7	4	5	3	2	7	3	0
Radnor	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Rhondda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Rhuddlan	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Rhymney Valley	0	0	2	0	3	0	8	79
South Pembrokeshire	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Swansea	0	0	5	4	0	1	4	9
Taff-Ely	4	0	2	3	0	8	9	1
Torfaen	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Vale of Glamorgan	0	0	0	0	1	1	9	3
Wrexham Maelor	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Ynys Môn	4	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
WALES	60	43	45	64	30	157	295	287

[1] Figures since 1985-86 include re-purchases under Part XVI of the Housing Act 1985.

SCOTLAND

Vehicle Lessees (Protection)

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will seek to introduce legislation giving protection to lessees of motor vehicles in Scotland similar to that provided for lessees in England under the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1983.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

The Law Commission and Scottish Law Commission recommended in their report on the sale and supply of goods (Law Com. No. 160, Scot. Law Com. No. 104, Cm. 137) that the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982 be extended to Scotland. This would give statutory protection to lessees of motor vehicles in Scotland, particularly in respect of implied terms as to quality and fitness for purpose. The Government have announced their support for the Law Commission's recommendations and the intention to legislate at an appropriate opportunity.

Waste Disposal at Sea

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those operations for which sea disposal licences for the deposit or incineration of waste at sea have been granted under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of licences issued by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 is as follows:—

	1986	1987	1988
Marine Incineration	0	0	0
Liquid Industrial Waste	0	0	0
Solid Industrial Waste	2	1	3
Sewage Sludge	2	2	2
Dredged Spoil	24	32	25

All licences are issued on an annual basis. Details of licences issued are maintained by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland on a public register.

Internal Market

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the total value to the latest available full year of public sector contracts in Scotland of a character which will make them open to Communitywide bidding as part of the creation of the internal market.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No assessment has been made because information is not held centrally on Scottish public sector contracts. The cost of establishing a means of assessing the value of public contracts in Scotland to be opened to Communitywide bidding would not be justified.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the reasons why the sale of the electoral register is allowed; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 1986 provide for the publication and supply of the electoral register, including the sale of copies at a prescribed fee. These provisions reflect the fact that the electoral register is a public document which requires to be widely circulated for electoral purposes; and the conclusion that its use by commercial organisations could not effectively be prevented, but that a charge for such use should be made.

Eggs

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that eggs imported into Scotland will have been subjected to equally rigorous egg production and hygiene regulations as eggs produced in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 4 April to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). Eggs are not normally imported directly into Scotland from other EC member states.

Fire Prevention (Cigarettes)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his response to the suggestion by the chief inspector of fire services for Scotland that the production of fire-proof cigarettes should be considered as an aid to reducing household fires.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I noted the comments made by Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire services for Scotland in his 1987 annual report on the research that was carried out in the United States on safer cigarettes. That research took the form of a technical study which is the subject of further research.

I welcome appropriate steps that can be taken to reduce the loss of life through fire in the home. At present my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, whose Department takes the lead in this area of consumer safety, is monitoring further research on the American technical study. I propose to review the matter when the results of this further research are available, probably in 1990.

Post-Chernobyl Restrictions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of farms, number of sheep and number of acres subject to post-Chernobyl restrictions as at February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of 69 farms, some 64,000 sheep and about 66,000 acres were subject to post-Chernobyl restrictions in February.

Bute House

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what liability for poll tax exists in respect of his official residence at Bute house in Edinburgh.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to the hon. Member for Leith (Mr. Brown) on 5 April 1989.

Preparatory Schools

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the names of the preparatory schools to be included in the assisted places scheme in the 1989-90 session and the amount of fee remission grant to be allocated to them.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have decided to admit 16 preparatory schools to the scheme in the 1989-90 school session and details including the fee remission grant are shown in the table. The inclusion of these schools in the scheme widens significantly the type of school available to less well-off families who could not have previously contemplated sending their children to such schools.

School	£
Aberlour House School, Moray	17,000
Ardvreck School, Crieff	3,000
Beaconhurst Grange School, Bridge of Allan	12,000
Belhaven Hill School, Dunbar	6,000
Blairmore School, Huntly	9,000
Butterstone House School, Dunkeld	3,000
Cargilfield School, Edinburgh	17,000
Clifton Hall School, Midlothian	15,000
Craigclowan Preparatory School, Perth	11,000
Crawfordton House School, Dumfreisshire	15,000
Croftinloan School, Pitlochry	14,000
Drumley House School, Ayrshire	14,000
Lathallan School, Montrose	15,000
New Park School, St. Andrews	14,000
Park Lodge School, Helensburgh	5,000
St. Mary's School, Melrose	13,000
TOTAL	183,000

Items in Lieu of Tax

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any items have been accepted in lieu of tax since he last made an announcement to Parliament.

Mr. Rifkind: Further to my statement of 11 May 1988 at column *128* I am pleased to announce that the following items have been accepted in lieu of tax:

Item	*Amount of tax satisfied* £
Two Marble Busts by Louis Francois Roubiliac	353,855
Two Portraits by Angelica Kauffmann	34,100
Painting by El Greco, known as "Fabula".	947,136·68

The Roubiliac busts have been formally allocated to the national museums of Scotland but will remain on public display in situ at Mellerstain house in Berwickshire. In accordance with the conditions upon which the other items were offered, the Kauffmann portraits and the El Greco "Fabula" have been allocated to the national galleries of Scotland. The acceptance of the El Greco, which was made possible by a call on the reserve in accordance with the arrangements agreed in July 1985, followed the precedent set by the acceptance of Picasso's "Weeping Woman" in that the national galleries of Scotland agreed to pay the owner the difference (£1,152,861) between the tax liability to be satisfied and the "special price" of £2·1 million.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Charles Powell and Mr. Bernard Ingham

Q100. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she will transfer Mr. Charles Powell and Mr. Bernard Ingham to other posts in the Civil Service; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No.

Petrol Prices

Q165. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister how many letters she has received regarding the increases in petrol prices.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware I have not received any recent representations on increases in petrol prices. However, since the Budget the price difference between unleaded and leaded petrol has widened to reflect the enhanced tax advantage for unleaded introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Cynon Valley

Q187. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Prime Minister when she expects to visit Cynon Valley.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

President Gorbachev (Visit)

Q210. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received following the visit of President Gorbachev.

Q220. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received following the visit of President Gorbachev.

The Prime Minister: The visit of President Gorbachev has been widely and warmly received.

Engagements

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 April.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Charles Powell

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what is the current grade of Mr. Charles Powell; and what is the salary attached to that grade.

The Prime Minister: The current grade of Mr. Charles Powell is grade 3 which has a salary range, inclusive of discretionary points and London allowance, of £39,600-£49,600 per annum.

Economic Policy

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister whether all speeches made by Cabinet Ministers during the course of the last four weeks on general economic policy represented Government policy.

The Prime Minister: Cabinet Ministers have collective responsibility for Government policy.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Forth: My Department has no empty properties suitable for residential accommodation.

Fireworks (Injuries)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the figures of injuries caused by fireworks in 1988.

Mr. Forth: According to reports from hospitals in England, Scotland and Wales, 877 people required treatment for injuries caused by fireworks during the three weeks leading up to 5 November 1988 and the few days after. This is 83 fewer than in 1987.

I am encouraged by these figures, which show a fall on last year, particularly as they show a significant 18 per cent. reduction in the number of street injuries and to children under 16.

Our safety campaigns last year highlighted the penalties facing shopkeepers who sell fireworks to children under 16 and individuals who let off fireworks in the street. I am pleased to see that the greatest reductions in injuries have been in the prime target groups of our campaigns, but we shall continue to seek greater safety all round.

We shall discuss with trading standards officers and industry how we can further improve standards of fireworks, particularly imports, and ways of testing their safety. The table sets out the figures of firework injuries in Great Britain over a four-week period in October/November 1988.

Firework injuries in Great Britain
(Four-week period in October to November)

Year	*1988*	*1987*	*1986*	*1985*	*1984*
Total	877	960	846	968	778
Place of accident:					
1. Family or private party	300	260	286	255	231
2. Semi-public display (eg scouts, cricket club)	69	88	72	76	65
3. Large public display	123	155	119	117	108
4. Casual incident in street etc.	298	364	299	435	298
5. Other place	65	73	52	64	59
6. Indoors	22	20	18	21	17
Type of firework					
1. Banger	162	163	161	241	175
2. Rocket	164	174	159	197	115
3. Roman candle, coloured fire etc.	83	96	88	90	103
4. Home-made or extracted powder	17	24	14	27	21
5. Other proprietary fireworks	86	109	118	73	74
6. Sparklers	102	95	80	67	65
7. Unspecified type	263	299	226	273	225

Year	1988	1987	1986	1985	1984
Severity of injury					
1. Fatal injury	—	—	—	—	1
2. Detained more than one night	69	60	48	53	55
3. Sufficient to cause absence from work or equivalent	167	158	160	231	161
4. Minor injury	587	661	582	632	506
5. Unspecified injury	54	81	56	52	55
Eye injuries (included in 2 to 5)	269	312	291	341	295
Age group of injured persons					
1. Over 20	280	252	235	214	180
2. 16 to 20	151	168	145	161	109
3. 13 to 15	166	220	207	271	208
4. Under 13	280	320	259	322	281

Blue Arrow

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he intends to appoint inspectors under section 432 of the Companies Act to investigate Blue Arrow and the Peter de Savary deal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I am considering the available information to see whether there is any action my Department need take.

Visual Display Units

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) by how much United Kingdom manufacturers' percentage share of the visual display unit market has fallen since 1986; what assessment he has made of the reasons for this fall; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he is taking to arrest the continuing decline of United Kingdom manufacturers' percentage share of the visual display unit market.

Mr. Forth: United Kingdom manufacturers' sales, as a percentage of the United Kingdom market for visual display units, fell from 64 per cent. in 1986 to 47 per cent. in the first nine months of 1988. The figures do not include VDUs that are manufactured and incorporated on site into complete systems, such as personal computers.

Since early 1987 IBM United Kingdom has manufactured a high proportion of its own VDUs at its British PC plant, and the fact that these are not included in the published VDU statistics is a significant factor in explaining the apparent decline.

Decisions about sourcing policy are a matter for the commercial judgment of individual businesses. The Government's responsibility is to create the right economic climate and to encourage enterprise. My Department has available a wide range of assistance to companies under the enterprise initiative.

Opium Derivatives

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the supply of opium derivatives is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The report is published today. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission found that a company with around 87 per cent. of the market in the supply of specified opium derivatives has exploited this monopoly situation by engaging in price discrimination and has been enabled to charge high prices in the domestic market, leading to very high levels of profit. The commission concluded that these practices were against the public interest.

The commission established that Macfarlan Smith Ltd, a subsidiary of Glaxo plc, had around 87 per cent. of the market in the supply of morphine, codeine, dihydrocodeine, diamorphine, ethylmorphine and pholcodine and was therefore a scale monopolist as defined in the Fair Trading Act 1973. The only other manufacturer is the Boots Company plc, which produced codeine and small amounts of morphine, principally for use in-house.

Opium derivatives are subject to domestic and international controls under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the United Nations single convention on narcotic drugs 1961 and any person wishing to manufacture or process these products in the United Kingdom, or to import them, requires a Home Office licence. There are no imports of opium derivatives into the United Kingdom because it has been Home Office policy for many years not to issue import licences.

The commission stated in its report that to increase competition in this market was of prime importance. It recommended that the Home Office, in conjunction with other Government Departments, should work towards the creation of a single EC market in the reference products through the reciprocal opening up of trade between EC member countries as soon as possible and not later than 1992. It also concluded that a measure of price protection for Macfarlan Smith's customers in the United Kingdom was necessary and recommended that the company should be required not to increase its maximum prices for reference products to these customers for a period of three years, except in the event of substantial and unavoidable increases in its costs.

We accept the commission's findings that the monopoly has effects adverse to the public interest and agree that it is most important to increase competition in this market. Therefore my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State will discuss with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, the best means to relieve Macfarlan Smith's customers from the company's abuse of its monopoly power while maintaining adequate safeguards against illicit trade. We hope to achieve this quickly so that a price freeze in the interim will not be necessary. Meanwhile my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State is inviting the Director General of Fair Trading to seek an undertaking from the monopolist that it will continue to make its list of maximum prices available to customers.

Girobank

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further progress has been made in finding a suitable buyer for Girobank.

Mr. Newton: After detailed discussion with a number of interested parties, the Post Office board has decided to accept the conditional offer made by the Alliance and Leicester building society to purchase Girobank plc. I have endorsed this decision which I am satisfied takes full account of the factors for the sale set out by myself and my predecessor.

I understand that the Alliance and Leicester's conditional offer to the Post Office is to acquire the equity and subordinated debt of Girobank for £130 million subject to completion adjustments. The Post Office will now enter into detailed negotiations with the Alliance and Leicester with a view to completion as soon as practicable within the coming weeks. My consent will be required before the final sale can take place.

In addition, the requirements of the relevant competition legislation will need to be satisfied and the agreement of the Bank of England will be needed to the operation of the bank under a new owner. If the negotiations are successful the Alliance and Leicester will also need to satisfy the Building Societies Commission before the sale is completed.

Arms Exports

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, in the light of the attendance of British arms companies at the forthcoming Baghdad international arms fair, he has any plans to change the current restrictions on the export of arms to Iraq.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* There are no plans to change the current restrictions on the export of arms to Iraq which impose an embargo on the export of lethal equipment. A licence is required for the export to Iraq of goods which are subject to control under the Export of Goods (Control) Order, 1987, (SI 1987 No. 2070) as amended.

Applications for such licences are examined in particular against the guidelines on the export of defence equipment to Iran and Iraq announced to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on 29 October 1985 at column 454. The guidelines are kept under review in the light of developments in the situation there.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will indicate the criteria relating to the gravity of human rights violations committed by countries in relation to which arms export licences are sought which he uses in deciding whether to grant such licences.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* A licence is required for the export of arms which are subject to control under the Export of Goods (Control) Order, 1987 (SI 1987 No. 2070) as amended. Licence applications are considered on a case by case basis, in accordance with stringent export control procedures which include, in particular, an assessment of the human rights record of the country concerned.

It is not our practice to grant a licence for the export of equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all current publicity campaigns being conducted by or for the Department of Trade and Industry or ones planned for the first three months of 1989-90, indicating those which involve television advertising and the starting and finishing dates of each campaign.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* The information is as follows:

Campaign	*Start*	*Completion*
Enterprise Initiative[1]	January 1988	continuing
Single European Market	March 1988	continuing
Export Initiative	January 1989	continuing
Bridge Programme[2]	March 1989	May 1989

[1] Includes television advertising in the period April to June 1989.
[2] On behalf of all Government Departments.

HEALTH

Self-governing Hospitals

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received any representations regarding the scope for self-governing hospitals to set their own rates of pay for staff.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received representations from a number of individuals and representative organisations on this subject.

DHAs and FPCs (Membership)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of district health authorities and family practitioner committee membership in England and Wales *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* currently is made up of trade union nominees; and if he will make a statement on the criteria he uses in appointing district health authority and family practitioner committee members.

Mr. Mellor: In England district health authorities have only existed in their present form since 1982. No information is available centrally about members of family practitioner committees in 1979, since at that time they were appointed by area health authorities.

In England, currently 33 family practitioner committee members were nominated by trade unions. Information is not held centrally about district health authority members since they are appointed by the relevant regional health authority and local authorities. When appointing family practitioner committee members we endeavour to achieve a reasonable balance of age, sex, experience and geographical location. Regional health authorities are asked to do the same when appointing DHA members. However, all members are appointed on the basis of the individual contribution they can make and not to represent any personal or sectional interest.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Human Organs (Sales)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he intends to take to prohibit the sale of human organs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Government have today introduced the Human Organ Transplants Bill which seeks to ban the sale of human organs intended for transplant. The Bill would make it a criminal offence to:

make or receive payment for supplying, or offering to supply, an organ from a dead or living person;
act as a broker for such an arrangement;
advertise organs or for organs to be provided for payment;
transplant an organ from a living donor who is not closely related (cousin or closer relative) to the recipient, unless certain conditions are satisfied. These conditions would be set out in the regulations.

The regulations would specify the way in which the relationship between voluntary donor and recipient would be established and the conditions which would have to be satisfied for those who are not closely related. Responsibility for ensuring that the regulations were being complied with would be given to such authority as would be set up under those regulations.

Pharmaceutical Services

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to issue the promised clearer guidelines in respect of applications to provide pharmaceutical services.

Mr. Mellor: We have already issued advice on the effects of a judgment by the High Court on applications for the minor relocation of a pharmacy. We have been discussing these effects and a number of other matters with interested parties and will issue draft guidance for comment shortly.

Radioactivity (Accidents)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each district health authority *(a)* the establishment of medical physicists appropriately qualified to carry out the duties identified in circulars HC (89) 8 and HN (FP) (89) 8 and *(b)* the number of such appropriately qualified physicists in post at the latest available date.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not collected centrally.

Radiotherapy Physicists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the staffing levels recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection for radiotherapy physicists in terms of new courses on radiotherapy treatment.

Mr. Mellor: In 1985 the international commission on radiological protection published a document entitled "Protection of the Patient in Radiation Therapy". Page 39 of that document states that one of the goals for radiation oncology staffing is one medical physicist per 400 new patients treated per year.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each region *(a)* the number of radiotherapy physicists required to fulfil the staffing levels recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection in terms of new courses of radiotherapy treatment and *(b)* the number of such radiotherapy physicists currently in post.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital and Community Health Service

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was Government spending on the hospital and community health service budget as a proportion of the average household income in 1987-88.

Mr. Freeman: Gross expenditure on the hospital and community health service per household in the United Kingdom in 1987-88 represented 4·5 per cent. of average household income in that year.

General Practitioners

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there were in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available; and what is his estimate of future trends.

Mr. Mellor: The information required is set out in the following table.

Unrestricted principals in England

As at 1 October	*Number*
1979	21,357
1987	24,922
1988	[1]25,322

[1] Provisional.

The second advisory committee for medical manpower planning, which reported earlier this year assumed a growth of 1·5 per cent. per annum until the early 1990s followed by a decrease of 0·5 per cent. per annum up to 2005. Paragraph 7.22 of the White Paper "Working for Patients" sets out the Government's policy on GP numbers.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Freeman: Information to this level of detail is not collected by the Department.

Babies (Alcohol)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the maximum amount of alcohol that is assessed as acceptable for babies to consume daily; and if he will request the manufacturers of gripe water to label their products with the percentage of alcohol contained, to reconsider the amount of the recommended dose, and to display warnings of the dangers of exceeding it.

Mr. Freeman: I am advised that the small amount of alcohol contained in some gripe waters should not intoxicate babies if used responsibly by parents in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.

Family Practitioner Service

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the family practitioner service in 1978-79 and in 1987-88; and what was the total cost of drugs prescribed by general practitioners at those two dates.

Mr. Mellor: The gross costs of the family practitioner services in England, including capital expenditure but excluding administration and related costs, were £1,434 million in 1978-79, and £4,210 million in 1987-88. The gross cost of drugs prescribed by general practitioners in 1978-79 and 1987-88 were £558 million and £1,547 million respectively.

Family Doctors

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints were made against family doctors over the past five years.

Mr. Mellor: Complaints investigated by family practitioner committees against family doctors in England under the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1974 were:

	Number
1984	952
1985	1,286
1986	1,138
1987	1,027
1988	1,162

In addition some complaints are resolved by family practitioner committees on an informal basis with the agreement of the parties concerned.

Salary Scales

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the advances in the maximum of the personal secretary scale and higher clerical scale over the last 15 years.

Mr. Mellor: The maximum of the pay scales for personal secretary and higher clerical officer grades from 1 April 1974 are shown in the following table.

Effective from 1 April	*Personal secretary* £	*Higher clerical officer* £
1974	1,773	1,995
1975	2,274	2,553
[1]1975	2,388	2,691
1976	2,700	3,003
1977	2,843	3,153
1978	3,104	3,452
1979	3,787	4,240
1980	4,317	4,834
1981	4,571	5,119
1982	4,845	5,426
1983	5,063	5,670
1984	5,291	5,925
1985	5,529	6,191
1986	5,885	6,556
1987	6,148	6,884
1988	6,474	7,228

[1] Effective from 1 July.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has about the practice of some health authorities of paying secretaries on the general administrative grade plus proficiency allowances; and if he will give a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold such information centrally. The grading of posts and payment of allowances are matters for individual employing authorities in accordance

with agreements reached in the administrative and clerical staffs Whitley council. Under existing agreements proficiency allowances are not payable to staff on the general adminstrative grade.

Health Care (Rural Areas)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his future plans for provision of health care in rural areas of South Yorkshire.

Mr. Freeman: Provision and planning of local health services is a matter for the district and regional health authorities. Since responsibility for South Yorkshire lies with four district health authorities—Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield—the hon. Member may care to write to the chairman of the Trent regional health authority for the information he seeks.

TRANSPORT

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The numbers and percentages of women and ethnic minority staff employed by the Department at present are:

	Total	*Women*		[1] *Recorded ethnic minorities*	
	Number	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
All grades	14,880	6,745	45·0	384	2·6
Grade 1	1	0	—	0	—
Grade 2	3	0	—	0	—
Grade 3	18	1	5·6	0	—
Grade 4	15	0	—	0	—
Grade 5	92	8	8·7	1	1·0
Grade 6	110	0	—	2	1·8
Grade 7	645	42	6·5	14	2·2

[1] Figures for numbers of ethnic minority staff are based on a voluntary confidential survey of staff; the response rate was 72 per cent. overall and 84 per cent. for grades 1 to 7.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department completed its voluntary survey of the ethnic origins of staff already in post in the autumn of 1987. This information is kept up to date on a continuous basis by asking job applicants to complete a questionnaire about their ethnic origin.

The Cabinet Office will be publishing the results of its national ethnic survey of all Departments later this year.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Service Commission is responsible for recruitment of top grades to all Departments of the Civil Service. Recruitment and promotion are carried out on the principle of fair and open competition.

Transatlantic Flights (Prestwick)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* figures showing the number of transatlantic flights *(a)* originating at Prestwick airport and *(b)* using Prestwick as an interim landing point in the years 1978 to 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department does not have this information. I shall draw my hon. Friend's question to the attention of the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority, who may be able to provide it at least for the later years.

Scottish Lowland Air Traffic

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the review of Scottish lowland air traffic distribution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a large number of representations about BAA's request for a review of Scottish lowland airports policy, the greater proportion against changing it.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his review of Scottish lowland air traffic distribution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend is considering BAA plc's request for a review in the light of advice from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland; he will make an announcement in due course.

A17-A151 Junction (Lighting)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of whether the junction of the A17 road with the A151 is adequately illuminated at night.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We considered the provision of lighting carefully during preparation of the A17 New Washway road scheme. Lighting is both expensive and intrusive and can be justified only where it is expected to make a significant contribution to road safety. The provision of lighting to the west of Boston road roundabout, including the A151 link road junction, could not be justified.

We do not normally light isolated junctions in rural areas except as part of a larger system. Isolated clusters of

lights can be dangerous because switching from darkness to light and back in quick succession can disorientate drivers on the main road. The proper way to warn drivers of a junction is by adequate signing. This has been done.

Mersey Tunnels (Tolls)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make the orders authorising an increase in Mersey tunnel tolls; whether he intends to use his powers under the County of Merseyside Act 1980 to confirm or modify the toll levels for fiscal year 1989-90; how any waiving of interest repayments would be authorised and financed; what are his long-term plans for the financing of the Mersey tunnels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 14 April a letter was sent to the Merseyside passenger transport authority informing it of the Secretary of State's decision to confirm, with modifications, its order setting new toll levels for the Mersey tunnels. The order will be made shortly.

The long-term financing of the tunnels is the responsibility of the PTA. I hope there will now be fresh discussions with the PTA about its options for putting the finances of the tunnels on a sound basis.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider lifting tolls on the Mersey tunnels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Mersey tunnels were promoted by the local authorities under legislation on the basis that they should be tolled. The legislation does not provide for the Secretary of State to abolish tolls.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission a study into the potential increase in traffic using the Mersey tunnels should tolls be lifted.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Mersey tunnels are the responsibility of the Merseyside PTA. Any such study would be a matter for it.

Motorways (Speed Limit)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has conducted to establish whether a 70 mph limit on motorways is conducive to bunching.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is little evidence to suggest that the introduction of the 70 mph speed limit on motorways has contributed to dangerous bunching. The limit has, however, contributed to a reduction in accidents on motorways rather than the increase which might be expected if dangerous bunching was on the increase. The severity of injuries is also lower at lower speeds.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information for regions in England is:

Properties owned by the Department and suitable for residential accommodation

Region	*Number*	*Percentage empty for up to a year*	*Percentage empty for over a year*
South West	139	15	5
Eastern	365	2	1
South East	210	7	3
North West	406	—	—
East Midlands	104	11	10
West Midlands	82	11	5
London	866	2	3
Yorkshire and Humberside	54	13	11
Northern	29	—	—
England total	2,255	4	3

In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales the respective Secretaries of State are responsible for the management of land purchased for national road schemes.

Roads (Expenditure)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent in 1988-89 under the national roads England vote (class VIII, vote I).

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Expenditure is provisionally estimated at £1,021·6 million, less than 2 per cent., some £20 million, below the cash limit of £1,041·4 million. This reflects commitment to making full use of provision for roads expenditure within the discipline of cash limits.

Air Security

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the introduction of mandatory protective measures for modern aircraft requiring *(a)* the fitting of locks to doors and latches and *(b)* the reinforcing of bulkheads and control systems from possible explosive damage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The question would be more appropriately directed to the Civil Aviation Authority, which has the statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of civil aviation. I shall bring the hon. Member's concern to the attention to the chairman.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department of Education and Science owns no residential accommodation.

Modern Hebrew

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what representations he has received about the status of modern Hebrew in the GCSE curriculum;

(2) if he will make a statement about the position of modern Hebrew in the GCSE modern language schedules;

(3) if he will consider revising the GCSE schedules to include modern Hebrew; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend is not aware of any issue concerning the GCSE in modern Hebrew. We assume that the hon. Member is referring to the draft order on modern foreign languages in the national curriculum and the proposals which my right hon. Friend announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) on 3 March at column *338*. My right hon. Friend has received a small number of representations from organisations, local education authorities, teachers and others about the place of modern Hebrew in the national curriculum. We are at present considering the responses received during the consultation period.

Universities (Grants)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the University Grants Commission under its present powers, can divide grants to universities into separate blocks for teaching and for research.

Mr. Jackson: This would be within the powers available to the Universities Funding Council under the Education Reform Act 1988.

Teachers (Incentive Allowances)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a calculation, in relation to his Department's figure of total baseline costs of school teachers' incentive allowances shown in appendix A of Cm. 625, showing how the total figure was derived from the expected numbers of allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The derivation of the figure for the total baseline costs of incentive allowances shown in appendix A of the second report of the interim advisory committee on school teachers' pay and conditions is set out in the following table:

Estimated numbers[1] and cost[2] of incentive allowances, financial year 1989-90

Rate	*Level of allowance (£)*	*Numbers in ordinary schools (000's)*	*Numbers in special schools (000's)*	*Total numbers (000's)*	*Total cost (£ million)*
A	801	53·5	0	53·5	49·4
B	1,200	54·2	11·5	65·7	90·8
C	2,400	14·8	2·1	16·9	46·7
D	3,201	26·1	0·3	26·4	97·4
E	4,401	8·9	0·1	9·0	45·6
Total					329·9

[1]Numbers are a financial year average of the estimates for the school years 1988-89 and 1989-90. These take the accelerated introduction of the A allowances into account.

[2]The total cost figure includes employers' oncosts.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what announcements he made in 1988, in relation to school teachers' pay and allowances for 1988-89, concerning the total value or cost of incentive allowances payable in that year; if he will publish a calculation for each such figure of total value or cost showing how the total figure was derived from the expected numbers of allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend made no such announcements in 1988.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Attendance Allowance

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects people who are terminally ill to be able to claim attendance allowance immediately, in line with the recommendation of the recent Social Security Advisory Committee report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) on 6 February at column *490*.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr Peter Lloyd: All property occupied by the Department is vested in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment; any surplus property is returned to the Property Services Agency for reuse or disposal as appropriate.

Social Fund

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many referrals have been made to the social fund inspectors; of these, how many have been referred back to Department of Social Security local offices for reconsideration; how many of the decisions referred back to the local office have been altered and if he will also split the figures issued *(a)* between community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans and *(b)* and by region.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am advised by the social fund commissioner that between 11 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 social fund inspectors received 2,954 applications for

review. A total of 1,109 cases have been referred back to social fund officers for determination. The regional details are as follows:

Table 1—Applications for review

	Budgeting loans	Crisis loans	Community care grants	Totals
London North	53	20	145	218
London South	43	12	51	106
Midlands	139	38	158	335
North Eastern	471	26	223	720
North Western	412	16	131	559
Scotland	529	29	232	790
Wales and South Western	122	21	83	226
TOTALS	1,769	162	1,023	2,954

Table 2—Applications referred back to the SFO for determination

	Budgeting loans	Crisis loans	Community care grants	Totals
London North	21	5	75	101
London South	17	4	16	37
Midlands	58	16	56	130
North Eastern	183	5	90	278
North Western	185	1	54	240
Scotland	164	9	63	236
Wales and South Western	46	5	36	87
TOTALS	674	45	390	1,109

Table 3—Applications redetermined in the applicant's favour

	Budgeting loans	Crisis loans	Community care grants	Totals	Decisions not completed
London North	5	2	35	42	22
London South	5	0	4	9	7
Midlands	24	3	29	56	18
North Eastern	82	1	38	121	15
North Western	68	0	19	87	34
Scotland	77	5	36	118	18
Wales and South Western	17	2	18	37	8
TOTALS	278	13	179	470	122

Community Care Grants

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will issue a direction extending eligibility for community care grants to people leaving institutional care whose income is above income support level because they are entitled to invalidity benefit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 16 December at column *750-51*.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state for the financial year 1988-89, the number of claimants who were awarded and accepted *(a)* a social fund loan and *(b)* a community care grant as a percentage of the total number who received single payments in 1987-88; and in each case, what was the proportion which these represented of the total number of income support, supplementary benefit, claimants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on the number of individuals receiving an award is not collected.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state for the financial year 1988-89, the number of income support claimants awarded and accepting *(a)* two budgeting loans, *(b)* three budgeting loans, *(c)* four budgeting loans, *(d)* five budgeting loans and *(e)* six or more budgeting loans.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state, for the financial year 1988-89, the number of his Department's local offices spending less than *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 60 per cent. and *(c)* 75 per cent. of their community care grant budget.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Such information for the period April 1988 to February 1989 is available in the Library.

Information for March 1989 will be placed in the Library later this month.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state, for the financial year 1988-89, the proportion of total social fund expenditure which has been subsequently written off as unrecoverable.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is available only for the period ending 30 September 1989. The details are set out as follows and are provisional:

	£
Funeral payments	6,354,434
Budgeting loans	4,315
Crisis loans	10,920

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state, for the financial year 1988-89, the proportion of social fund loan application refusals which were issued on the grounds of the claimant's inability to repay.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Only 1 per cent. of applications processed were refused on grounds of the applicant's inability to repay.

Benefits

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the value in real terms both in absolute figures and as a percentage, of retirement and other state pensions and all other welfare and national insurance benefits and allowances paid in November 1979 in relation to those to be paid from April 1988; and if he will indicate the actual figure for each benefit in each year.

Mr. Scott: The comparisons requested between benefit rates in November 1979 and April 1988 are set out as follows. Comparisons are given only for those benefits in existence at both dates. Benefit rates for the intervening years are set out in "Social Security Statistics 1988", a copy of which is in the Library.

	November 1979[1] *rates in real terms* £	*April 1988 rates* £	*Percentage change in real terms*
Retirement pension[2]			
Single person	40·91	41·15	0·6
Married couple	65·50	65·90	0·6
Unemployment benefit[3]			
Single person	32·48	32·75	0·8
Married couple	52·59	52·95	0·7
Sickness benefit[3]			
Single person	32·48	31·30	−3·6
Married couple	52·59	50·70	−3·6
Industrial disablement benefit[4]	66·72	67·20	0·7
Industrial death benefit[5]	41·88	41·15	−1·7
Maternity allowance			
Single person	32·48	31·30	−3·6
Married couple	52·59	50·70	−3·6
Non-contributory retirement pension			
Single person	24·58	24·75	0·7
Married couple	39·33	39·55	0·6
War disablement pension[6]	66·72	67·20	0·7
War widows' pension[7]	53·47	53·75	0·5
Attendance allowance			
Higher rate	32·66	32·95	0·9
Lower rate	21·77	22·00	1·0
Invalid care allowance			
Single person	24·58	24·75	0·7
Married couple	39·33	39·55	0·6
Severe disablement allowance			
Single person	24·58	24·75	0·7
Married couple	39·33	39·55	0·6
Mobility allowance	21·07	23·05	9·4
Child benefit[8]	7·02	7·25	3·2
One parent benefit	4·39	4·90	11·6

[1] Benefit rates for 1979 to 1982 were set as a result of a forecast of future inflation, rather than by the historic method used since 1983; this discontinuity makes comparisons difficult.
[2] The basic rate of benefit, which is also the basic rate of benefit for invalidity pension and widow's pension.
[3] Rate for benefit under pension age.
[4] 100 per cent. disablement pension.
[5] Higher permanent rate. Since 11 April 1988, this benefit is paid only to those already in receipt at 11 April 1988.
[6] 100 per cent. disablement pension for other ranks.
[7] Higher rate.
[8] Rate in 1979 was set in April.

Rating Reform

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security further to his reply of 14 April to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan, *Official Report*, column

743, on deductions from benefits for payment of the poll tax, on what authority the interim advice to which he referred was given.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The interim advice was issued on the authority of officials within the headquarters of the Department. It took the form of an internal management memorandum and was designed to keep regional and local staff abreast of developments in this area. The content of the memorandum paraphrases the Community Charges (Deductions from Income Support) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 507) which came into force on 8 April 1989.

Child Benefit

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the level of child benefit in 1989-90 if the increase in tax-free income of taxpayers with children were maintained at the same level as that of taxpayers without children in relation to the 1978-79 level.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 21 December 1988]:* Child benefit is a part of the public expenditure programme not a personal allowance against income-tax. For the purposes of answering this question, in the table, personal income tax allowance in both 1978-79 and 1989-90 have been converted into tax revenue foregone and added to the annual value of child benefit in each year. The results suggest that, in order to restore parity in the coming financial year with 1978-79 for married taxpayers with and without children, child benefit would have to be reduced by 32p for one-earner married couples with one or two children and by 17p for couples with three children. If the comparison were based on single taxpayers, the corresponding reductions would be 50p and 30p.

Reductions in child benefit needed to maintain the 1978-79 level of tax-free income for taxpayers with and without children

	Single person	*Married couple*	*Married Couple, 1 child, aged 3*	*Married couple, 2 children, aged 4, 6*	*Married couple 3 children, aged 3, 8, 11*
Child Benefit and tax not paid on allowances 1978-79 (£pa) Note 1	325·05	506·55	673·19	839·83	1,018·02
Child Benefit and tax not paid on allowances 1989-90 (£pa) Note 1	696·25	1,093·75	1,470·75	1,847·75	2,224·75
Child Benefit and tax not paid on allowances 1989-90 if married couple with children increased at same ratio as married couple without children	—	—	1,454·09	1,814·03	2,198·92
Change in child benefit required in 1989-90 to restore to position in 1978-79 (£ per child per week)	—	—	−0·32	−0·32	−0·17
Child Benefit and tax not paid on allowances 1989-90 if married couple with children increased at same ratio as single person	—	—	1,440·63	1,797·24	2,178·56
Change in child benefit required in 1989-90 to restore to position in 1978-79 (£ per child per week)	—	—	−0·58	−0·49	−0·30

Notes:

1. Tax free income is calculated by applying the standard rate of tax to the appropriate tax allowances and adding the annual value of Child Benefit in payment. For example, tax free income in 1989-90 for a one-earner married couple with one child is calculated as: 25 per cent. (standard tax rate) × £4,375 (married man's tax allowance) = £1,093·75 plus £377 (Child Benefit of £7·25 per week for 52 weeks). Total tax free income = £1,470·75.
2. Figures for 1978-79: tax allowances—single person's £985, married couple £1,535, children under 11 £100, children between 11-15 years £135. Tax rate 33 per cent. Child Benefit £2·57 per week.
3. Figures for 1989-90: tax allowances—single person £2,785, married man £4,375. Standard rate of tax 25 per cent. Child Benefit £7·25 per week.
4. All figures are subject to rounding.

DEFENCE

Pyrton

Mr. Heseltine: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which military units and civilian contractors have been responsible for construction work at the depot site in the parish of Pyrton in the county of Oxfordshire;

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of any documents held by his Department relating to the acquisition, planning status, construction, rating and occupancy of the depot site in the parish of Pyrton in the county of Oxfordshire which have not been released to the public record office;

(3) which detachments of troops have occupied the site of the depot in the parish of Pyrton in the county of Oxfordshire since its completion, indicating the dates of duration of each occupancy.

Mr. Neubert: The property was transferred to the Department of Environment in 1981. I regret that the details requested are not to hand. I will write to my right hon. Friend.

Armed Forces (Pensions)

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the new provisions for members of the armed forces to make additional voluntary contributions to their pensions relating to payments additional to their basic salaries have been adequately publicised.

Mr. Neubert: Arrangements under which members of the armed forces pension scheme may make freestanding additional voluntary contributions based on additional pay were widely promulgated to service personnel in January of this year. In order to provide the maximum possible time for personnel to take advantage of these arrangements within the 1988-89 tax year, promulgation was by signal. Further publication was intended to follow but has been deferred pending review and clarification of the provisions which will be appropriate when the proposed changes in AVC requirements and limits for tax relief purposes, announced during the Budget statement, take effect. I am satisfied that in these circumstances arrangements which are currently available to members of the armed forces have been appropriately publicised.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Neubert: Statistics are not collected in quite the form requested. The latest figures available show that on 30 November 1988 there were 78,520 tri-service married quarters, of which 14·4 per cent. had been vacant for under a year and 5·8 per cent. vacant for over a year. At 30 September 1988, of 1,828 civilian houses (including 263 leased from local authorities) 6·2 per cent. had been vacant for under six months and 7·1 per cent. for over six months.

Some of these vacant properties are in the process of disposal, others will be undergoing major maintenance or refurbishment, and yet others will be allocated and awaiting the arrival of the families to the unit.

The breakdown by region is:

Percentage vacant by region
Tri-service married quarters (as at 30 November 1988)

Region	*Under 1 year*	*Over 1 year*
Northern	14·4	5·8
Yorkshire/Humberside	16·8	5·0
East Midlands	21·6	16·8
East Anglia	13·0	5·1
South East	13·1	4·2
South West	15·5	5·5
West Midlands	14·9	10·8
North West	13·8	1·2
Wales	14·2	4·6
Scotland	15·4	7·0
Northern Ireland	11·4	1·6

Civilian houses (as at 30 September 1988)

Region	*Under 6 months*	*Over 6 months*
Northern	5·5	20·0
South East	4·0	1·5
South West	12·3	7·4
West Midlands	0	8·7
North West	0	0
Wales	3·7	45·1
Scotland	7·9	11·7

Territorial Army Bases (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to commission an investigation into the security of Territorial Army bases in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Security of all Ministry of Defence establishments and bases is kept under constant review as a matter of course. I have no plans at present to commission a specific investigation into security at Territorial Army bases in Northern Ireland.

Gibraltar (Incident)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the special explosives ordnance team was sent to Gibraltar to assist in the operation in Gibraltar on 6 March 1988; when it left the United Kingdom; and when it returned.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As was made clear at the inquest, it would not be in the public interest to reveal details about events prior to 6 March 1988 as these could reveal the intelligence background to the operation and methods of operation of the security forces. An explosives ordnance disposal team was sent to Gibraltar when requested by the commissioner of police. They were present in Gibraltar at the time of the incident, carried out render-safe procedures on the suspected car bomb in the white Renault car, and returned to the United Kingdom shortly afterwards.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the officers, who examined the Renault car parked in Main street, Gibraltar on 6 March 1988, concluded that it did not contain a bomb.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Widows' Pensions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the level of pensions paid to widows of military personnel; and what information he has on equivalent pensions for those in other countries of the European Community.

Mr. Neubert: The pensions paid to the widows of military personnel under the armed forces pension scheme are at rates which depend upon the individual circumstances of each case. Factors which will affect the rate payable include the rank held by the husband, the date of his retirement or death in service, the provisions of the scheme at that date, the nature of his termination of service, and in most but not all cases the length of service given. It is not therefore possible to provide the information requested.

Nuclear Installations (Overflying)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what air traffic control restrictions apply to military aircraft in relation to flights over nuclear installations.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my predecessor gave to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on 16 November 1987 at column *432*.

Lance Missile

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received from his United States counterpart concerning the length of time required to modernise the Lance missile; and what assessment he has made.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United States Administration have kept allies fully informed about their development programme for a successor to the Lance missile. The selection by the United States of a launcher at the end of last year was geared to having a new system available for development by the mid-1990s.

Battle Tanks

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many main battle tanks are in operational service with the British Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to page 6 of the NATO publication "Conventional Forces in Europe: The Facts", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any main battle tanks that are currently in operational service are used as a source of spare parts for other main battle tanks.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In order to maximise operational availability, it is established practice to use tanks awaiting repair as a source of spare parts for other main battle tanks when the parts needed are not readily available through the normal supply chain.

Namibia

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training the British contingent of the United Nations transition assistance group receives in peacekeeping operations prior to its deployment to Namibia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Prior to deployment, the British contingent to UNTAG (Britcon) underwent a training period during which they practised general military skills, were familiarised with aspects of peace-keeping operations, and were briefed on particular problems that they would encounter in Namibia such as the extremes of climate and the necessary medical precautions that they would need to take. They also practised their primary and specialist role, which is the provision of the force signals unit. In addition, the areas in which they were to operate were thoroughly reconnoitred.

It should be borne in mind that UNTAG is not primarily a peace-keeping force but is there to monitor and supervise Namibia's transition to independence.

Trawler Nets (Irish Sea)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what United States submarines were in the Irish sea during 17 April; and if any reported an incident with the nets of the trawler Laurel;

(2) if a British submarine was involved in an incident on 17 April in the Irish sea with the fishing nets of the trawler Laurel, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand that a United States Navy nuclear submarine was in the vicinity when the fishing vessel, Laurel, reported early on Monday 17 April 1989, that she had been towed backwards after a submerged object snagged her nets. When the submarine surfaced, it was found to have sustained superficial damage consistent with involvement in such an incident. The United States authorities are investigating.

No Royal Navy submarine was involved.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Next Steps Initiative

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has identified any candidates for agency status under the next steps initiative within his Department.

Mr. MacGregor: Following preliminary studies in my Department I have decided that the central veterinary laboratory, Weybridge, and the new veterinary medicines directorate which was set up on 3 April 1989 on the Weybridge site should be considered as further candidates for agency status. Feasibility studies will now be carried out with a view to the preparation of draft agency frameworks.

Pollution

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of agricultural development advisory service staff time is spent on advising farmers about methods of preventing pollution of rivers.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The 1988 edition of "Ministerial Information in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food" (MINIM), a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House, indicates the resources specifically devoted to the control of pollution in 1987-88. ADAS advisers do provide advice on environmental matters, including control of pollution, when responding to requests for advice on other relevant subjects.

Eggs (Imports)

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that eggs imported into the United Kingdom will have been subjected to equally rigorous egg production and hygiene regulations as eggs produced in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 4 April at column *51*. The monitoring system mentioned in that reply has now been put in place.

Post-Chernobyl Restrictions

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate how long restrictions will have to remain in force on farms affected by fallout from Chernobyl.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate how long restrictions will have to remain in force on farms affected by fallout from Chernobyl.

Mr. Ryder: We shall lift restrictions as soon as it is possible to do so without compromising food safety. The

broad downward trend in radioactivity levels within the Cumbria restricted area in 1988 compared with 1987 was encouraging. However, whilst there are sheep above the 1,000 bq/kg limit, restrictions will have to remain in force. We shall be reassessing the situation in the light of the 1989 monitoring results to see whether there is scope for reducing the area subject to restrictions later this year.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of farms, number of sheep and number of acres subject to post-Chernobyl restrictions as at February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: About 116,000 acres with some 80,000 sheep on about 150 holdings were subject to post-Chernobyl restrictions in February 1989.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of properties owned by his Ministry and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Four properties, less than 2 per cent. of the Ministry's holdings, are vacant; two have been empty for over a year. Three are in Cambridgeshire and one in Hertfordshire. All are being sold. In addition, there are a small number of properties on experimental centres which are temporarily vacant pending occupation by employees.

Aluminium Additives

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to which foods aluminium is added and for what purpose; and if he will make a statement regarding the necessity for, and safety of, aluminium food additives.

Mr. Ryder: The Colouring Matter in Food Regulations 1973 (as amended) permit the use of aluminium for the external colouring of dragees and for the decoration of sugar-coated flour confectionery only. In its report on these regulations the food advisory committee recommended that it should be made clear in future regulations that permission to use aluminium, silver and gold on dragees extends only to the traditional cake decoration dragees. The Government are currently considering the results of consultations on the report.

Medical advisers in the Department of Health have advised that the regular consumption of larger aluminium-coated confectionery is undesirable because this may lead to an intake of aluminium by children in excess of the provisional tolerable weekly intake recently recommended by the joint FAO/WHO expert committee on food additives.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the county councils that have received grants for the disposal of bovine carcases infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and what is the amount paid per animal in each case.

Mr. Donald Thompson: County councils do not receive grants for the disposal of carcases, which is the responsibility of the state veterinary service. On occasions when assistance is provided by county councils, the Ministry pays any appropriate charge. Details of amounts paid are not held centrally.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amounts paid by different county councils to farmers for the disposal of each bovine carcase infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr Donald Thompson: Compensation is paid by the Government to farmers who have animals slaughtered because of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. The disposal of carcases is the responsibility of the state veterinary service and no payments are made by county councils.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the incineration plants within each county for the incineration of bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected cattle.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 23 March at column *722*.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list showing the cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy confirmed in each county for the latest four week period.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information is as follows:

County	*Confirmed cases*
Avon	9
Bedfordshire	3
Berkshire	6
Borders	1
Cambridgeshire	2
Central	1
Cheshire	5
Cleveland	1
Clwyd	5
Cornwall	52
Cumbria	2
Derbyshire	9
Devon	62
Dorset	44
Dumfries	7
Durham	1
Dyfed	12
Essex	4
Mid Glamorgan	1
South Glamorgan	3
Gloucestershire	14
Grampian	5
Gwent	3
Gwynedd	2
Hampshire	21
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	14
Hertfordshire	1
Highland	1
Humberside	1
Isle of Wight	2
Kent	20
Lancashire	5
Leicestershire	10
Lincolnshire	1
Merseyside	1
Norfolk	5
Northamptonshire	8
Northumberland	2

County	Confirmed cases
Nottinghamshire	5
Oxon	11
Powys	1
Salop	17
Somerset	35
Staffordshire	7
Strathclyde	4
Suffolk	7
Surrey	2
East Sussex	6
West Sussex	21
Tayside	2
Warwickshire	10
Wiltshire	26
North Yorkshire	13
West Yorkshire	2

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 14 April to the hon. Member for Caerphilly, how many of the 40 confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy were reported from EEC export approved slaugherhouses and how many were from non-EEC approved slaugherhouses.

Mr. Donald Thompson: This information is not available.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected cattle have been incinerated at each of the locations listed in his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 23 March, *Official Report*, column 722.

Mr. Donald Thompson: This information is not held centrally.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff he has employed to evaluate old pesticides since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him on 23 March 1989 at column 726. Since many of my staff in the Ministry's pesticides data evaluation unit have been involved in reviews as well as other evaluations it is not possible to identify precise numbers.

Sheep

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the becquerel readings of each of the 40 sheep selected from within the restricted area of Cumbria used in the feasility study into monitoring of sheep carcases at slaugherhouses in December 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The readings (becquerels per kilogramme) from the special instrument calibration trial were as follows:

	Readings
173	579
191	605
236	620
258	642
276	642
294	645
308	651
311	678
321	684
335	711
344	780
401	806
407	810
462	812
473	905
483	909
495	1,004
513	1,053
545	1,119
566	1,283

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what purpose the sheep involved in the December 1988 feasibility study into the monitoring of sheep carcases in slaughterhouses, referred to in his press release of 14 April, were intended to be used.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The sheep involved in the December study were specially selected from within the restricted area for scientific purposes. No part of the carcases went for human consumption.

Radioactivity

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to conduct an aerial survey for radioactivity in the 20 per cent. of the restricted area not covered in 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have no such plans at the present time.

Sectoral Quotas

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the reasons for the delay of some three months in the allocation of the sectoral quotas to the industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Fisheries Departments hope to contact the industry shortly about a new and important issue which has arisen since the general arrangements for 1989 sectoral allocations were agreed in consultation with the industry last October. The original target for the notification of final allocations was the end of March.

Sewage Waste

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the life cycle in salt water of sewage waste dumped off the north-east coast of England.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Sewage sludge is the byproduct of sewage treatment and is more than 95 per cent. water. The solid component consists of inorganic material such as soil, grit, sand and so on from run-off, together with organic solids such as those derived from food wastes, human and animal excreta and detergents. The organic solids are predominantly natural materials which are degradable in the marine environment by the action of dissolved oxygen, light and the diverse natural microbial flora. The rate of degradation varies according to the source of the individual components and the degree of sewage treatment. The ultimate products of degradation are carbon dioxide, inorganic nitrogen compounds and water.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the health implications for fishermen fishing in water off the mouth of the river Tyne of the dumping of sewage waste;

(2) what advice he has given to fishermen fishing in waters off the north-east coast of England in the vicinity of the area used for the dumping of sewage waste.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The subject of sewage disposal at sea and fishermen's occupational health was raised by representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations at a recent meeting with my officials. Arrangements were agreed with the fishermen's representatives for the reporting of medical evidence on this matter to the appropriate authorities, the Health and Safety Executive's employment medical advisory service.

RV Corystes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many days in the first four months of the current year the RV Corystes *(a)* was due to be in place and *(b)* was in place off the north-east of England.

Mr. Donald Thompson: A 16-day cruise off the north-east coast of England is due to begin on 25 April.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether scientists on his research vessel Corystes monitors for AIDS, hepatitis, meningitis, polio and other disease micro-organisms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Bacterial counts are taken on Ministry research vessel cruises in the area of sites licensed for the dumping of sewage sludge from ships. The measurements are taken from seabed sediments for the purpose of assessment of the fate of the material disposed of at sea.

Food Protection (Sea Fish)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the revocation of the Statutory Instrument, Public Health, Food Protection (Emergency Provisions) (Sea Fish) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 529); and what plans he has to introduce an alternative instrument.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 19 April. We shall continue our programme of sampling fish and crabs landed at south coast ports. Any necessary further restrictions will be introduced should this reveal evidence of lindane having leaked into the aquatic environment.

Infant Formulae (Aluminium Content)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has further information on the aluminium content of infant formulae.

Mr. Ryder: My Department's food science division has recently carried out a survey of the aluminium content of 10 brands of commonly available infant formulae. The Department of Health's independent expert committee on the toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment has considered the results of the survey. It concluded that the intakes of aluminium are well within the safety limits established by the World Health Organisation. Despite this it asked for further research to be undertaken, which will show whether or not further action is needed. Research on the bioavailability of aluminium from food has been commissioned at Southampton university. Work is in hand on identifying the forms in which aluminium occurs in foods and investigating the precise source of the aluminium in infant formulae. Consideration is also being given to the further work needed on the gastro-intestinal absorption and renal clearance of aluminium by infants.

Further information is contained in a food facts press notice being issued today, copies of which I am placing in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wakefield Prison (Chapel)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what chapel facilities exist at Wakefield prison for prisoners segregated on rule 43; when work was commenced on refurbishing the chapel; and when this work will be completed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Rule 43 prisoners segregated for their own protection may attend the temporary chapel at Wakefield prison but those who are segregated for reasons of good order and discipline may not. This is partly because of the location of the chapel and partly because of the nature of the offenders and offences concerned. The number of rule 43 prisoners who may not attend fluctuates between about 15 and 30, not all of whom will be practising Christians. Chaplains visit prisoners every day and will take private services for any prisoner who so requests.

A date has not yet been fixed for commencement of the refurbishment of the permanent chapel.

Quality of Life

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out in the *Official Report* details of those policies introduced by him since 1983 with the intention of improving the quality of life for the rural communities.

Mr. John Patten: Many of our policies on crime prevention are applicable to rural areas. We have issued a circular to the police and courts about the powers available to deal with outbreaks of disorder and issued guidance to the courts about arranging speedy court hearings after sudden outbreaks of disorder. We have strengthened controls on firearms and encouraged the creation of local farm watch and rural watch schemes to increase community co-operation in preventing crime.

Shotguns (Licences)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many shotgun licences were issued in 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested for 1988 is not yet available. Corresponding information for 1987 is published in table 3 of Home Office statistical bulletin 33/88, a copy of which is in the Library.

Game Licences

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many game licences were issued in 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 39,131 game licences were issued between 1 October 1987 and 30 September 1988.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The latest available figures show that 126 staff in grades 1 to 7 and their equivalents are women: this is just over 11 per cent. In the unified grades, 9 per cent. of staff at grade 3, 18 per cent. at grade 5, 4 per cent. at grade 6 and 15 per cent. at grade 7 are women.

Thirty six members of staff in grades 1 to 7 and their equivalents described themselves in staff surveys as of ethnic minority origin. This represents nearly 4 per cent. of respondents in these grades.

In the Home Office as a whole, 23 per cent. of staff are women; and 4 per cent. of respondents to staff surveys described themselves as of ethnic minority origin.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: All non-industrial staff in the Home Office were asked to state their ethnic origin in regional surveys conducted between 1983 and 1986. A further questionnaire was sent in September 1988 to those who had not previously responded. A survey of industrial staff will be undertaken shortly. People seeking posts in the Department are asked to state their ethnic origin when making their applications.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Hogg: Most senior posts are filled internally and the most important factor in increasing the number of ethnic minority staff in those posts will be their advancement over time through the promotion system. Considerable importance is attached to ensuring that they have every opportunity to do so. Recruitment direct to senior grades is generally conducted by the Civil Service Commission, and is always on the basis of fair and open competition. Advertisements make it clear that the Civil Service is an equal opportunities employer.

Women (Attacks and Murders)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1979 in England and Wales *(a)* the number of women murdered by their male partner and *(b)* the number of women attacked causing actual bodily harm by their male partner; and if he will show in his answer the percentage for each year this is of (i) all murders and (ii) all attacks causing actual bodily harm.

Mr. John Patten: Information relating to homicides is given in the table below; "homicide" includes offences decided by the court to be murder, manslaughter or infanticide and those cases in which a court decision has not yet been reached. Provision of information for years prior to 1982 would involve disproportionate cost. Information is not yet available for 1988 or 1989. Information is not available on the number of women attacked causing actual bodily harm by their male partner.

Female victims of homicides[1] in which the principal suspect was the spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant of the victim
England and Wales

Year	All offences currently recorded as homicide[2] (= 100 per cent.)	Female victims of partners[3] Number	Female victims of partners[3] Percentage of total
1982	557	102	18
1983	482	87	18
1984	537	97	18
1985	537	101	19
1986	576	109	19
1987	635	83	13

[1] As at 1 June 1988; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts or as further information becomes available.
[2] Including both male and female victims.
[3] Spouse, former spouse, cohabitant, former cohabitant.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Home Office owns quarters available for members of the prison service. As the Home Office is in the process of selling surplus prison service quarters, precise information is not available on a regional basis, but a broad estimate is that 10 per cent. of quarters have been vacant for more than 12 months and 3 per cent. for less than 12 months.

The following information is available about accommodation owned by the Property Services Agency but managed by the Home Office. Four properties managed by the Directorate of Telecommunications have been vacant for more than a year: one in Somerset and three in Nottinghamshire. Two out of 12 properties at the civil defence college in North Yorkshire have been vacant for over a year. Four out of 37 properties at the fire service college in Gloucestershire have been vacant for less than a year and two for over a year.

Road Vehicles (Prosecutions)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought under regulation 7(1) of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 and section 40(5) of the Road Traffic Act 1972 in each police force area in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: Since 1 January 1987, the information collected centrally does not separately distinguish

contravention of regulation 7(1) of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, although information for 1986 indicated that there were fewer than 400 prosecutions nationally for vehicles with excessive dimensions. The information available for 1987 on prosecutions for vehicles in a dangerous or defective condition, is for all forces and is shown in table 5 of "Offences relating to motor vehicles, England and Wales, 1987, Supplementary tables".

Mr. D. Miles

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason, and for how long, Mr. Dean Miles, prisoner 2672, has been held in the segregation unit at Her Majesty's prison, Albany; what category prisoner is Mr. Miles; for what category he was recommended; and why he is held in maximum security conditions in a dispersal prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Mr. Miles was removed from association with other prisoners at Albany prison on 10 November 1988 under prison rule 48, which allows for the segregation of prisoners pending adjudication. He continued to be segregated under rule 48 until 22 December, when his case was heard by the board of visitors and a disciplinary award of 14 days' exclusion from associated labour was made. This punishment was served in the segregation unit. On completion of the punishment the governor decided that Mr. Miles should be segregated from other prisoners, in the interests of good order and discipline, under prison rule 43. Mr Miles remains segregated under rule 43 at this time.

Mr. Miles is categorised as security category C. It is not unusual for category C prisoners to be held in prisons of a higher security classification, in particular if the governor of a lower security prison has requested their transfer on the grounds that they have proved unsuitable for the regime of a lower security prison. Prisoners' allocation and categorisation are reviewed periodically at a local level. I understand that the question of Mr. Miles' location is to be reviewed shortly.

Lollipop Persons

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the number of lollipop ladies and gentlemen in post in *(a)* the Ealing, North constituency, *(b)* the London borough of Ealing and *(c)* the Metropolitan police area against the agreed number required; if he will instigate an inquiry into their pay and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the number of persons employed on school crossing patrol duty is as follows:

	Strength	*Establishment*
(a) Ealing, North[1]	22	30
(b) London Borough of Ealing[1]	44	62
(c) Metropolitan police district	1,098	1,350

[1] The figures given are based upon the Metropolitan police divisions rather than constituency or borough boundaries. For the purpose of this answer, Ealing, North is taken to be the subdivisions of Ealing and Greenford, and the London borough of Ealing to be the divisions of Ealing and Southall.

The pay of Metropolitan police schools crossing patrols is being reviewed.

Sports Grounds (Safety)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress made in implementing each of the recommendations made in the report by the committee of inquiry into crowd safety and control at sports grounds.

Mr. John Patten: The Government's proposals for giving effect to the safety recommendations in the final report were set out in a consultative document produced in June 1986. All of these proposals except amendment to building regulations guidelines codes have been implemented.

The question of structural fire precautions and means of escape in buildings (including covered sports stands) is under review as part of the Government's comprehensive overhaul of the building regulations. It is the intention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to issue a consultative paper by the end of this year seeking comment on a package of proposals dealing with these issues.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which came into force on 1 January 1986 had already extended the police powers of search and arrest in ways which help them to deal with troublemakers at football grounds. The Public Order Act 1986 created a new offence of disorderly conduct to cover hooliganism in football grounds as elsewhere.

A further recommendation was to review the provisions of the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985 in relation to executive boxes. Following that review a relaxation of the controls over the sale and possession of alcohol in executive boxes was introduced in the Public Order Act 1986.

The Government's proposals for a membership scheme are contained in the Football Spectators Bill. This follows previous efforts to encourage the football authorities to introduce membership schemes on a voluntary basis.

Community Centres

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it remains the policy of the Government that community centres should be encouraged, supported and if necessary funded to provide facilities otherwise unavailable to a range of community groups.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office supports community centres through its funding of the National Federation of Community Organisations. The funding of individual centres is a local matter.

Female Prisoners (Education)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many females in Holloway prison were engaged in *(a)* work, *(b)* daytime education and *(c)* evening education on the most recent date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* On 3 April 1989, the latest date for which information is available 109 inmates were engaged in work, 76 in daytime education and 40 in evening education at Holloway prison.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total average number per day during 1988 of females in Holloway prison engaged in *(a)* work, *(b)* daytime education and *(c)* evening education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* Information held centrally relates to the period April to December 1988 and is not complete. Typically, some 40 to 50 inmates were working and about 85 were involved in daytime education, including vocational training courses. Information about the number of inmates participating in evening education is not readily available. However, on average, about 430 hours of evening education were provided each week.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many females in Styal prison were engaged in *(a)* work, *(b)* daytime education and *(c)* evening education, on the most recent date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* On 3 April 1989, the latest date for which information is available, 187 inmates were engaged in work and 41 in daytime education at Styal prison. No evening education took place on that particular date.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total average number per day during 1988 of females in Styal prison engaged in *(a)* work, *(b)* daytime education and *(c)* evening education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* Based on information held centrally for the period April to December 1988, an average of 167 inmates were daily engaged in work and 74 in daytime education. Information about the number of inmates participating in evening education is not readily available. However, on average, about 170 inmate hours of evening education were provided each week.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION

Barlow Clowes

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the hon. Member for Colchester, North, as Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, whether his Committee has received any report from the commissioner on the progress of his inquiry into the Department of Trade and Industry's handling of the Barlow Clowes affair.

Sir Antony Buck: It is not the practice of Select Committees to comment on their proceedings except by way of a report to the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Workplace Inspections

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what inspection of the House of Commons as a workplace takes place to ensure that it meets statutory standards.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

In meeting its responsibilities for the care and maintenance of Crown buildings, PSA's procedures are prescribed, as a minimum, to meet the requirements of all relevant legislation affecting the safety of the workplace. These procedures are applied on the parliamentary estate.

Organic Food

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether organic food is served in restaurants and cafeterias in the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply he received from the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on Tuesday 18 April. In future, whenever organic food is presented on a menu, its availability will be indicated.

Explanatory Memoranda

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Lord President of the Council what circulation is given outside the House to explanatory memoranda on Community legislation submitted to the House by Government Departments.

Mr. Wakeham: After deposit in both Houses, copies of explanatory memoranda are made available to the public primarily from the British library through public and other libraries.

ENVIRONMENT

Canary Wharf

Ms. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is available on the £1 billion tax allowance to the developers of Canary wharf, whether this amount of tax concession was envisaged when the enterprise zones were established; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have been asked to reply.

I cannot comment on the tax affairs of particular individuals or companies. The position generally is that a property developer who builds property for sale, whether within an enterprise zone or elsewhere, incurs his expenditure on revenue account and is entitled to relief for all expenditure incurred wholly and exclusively for trade purposes under the normal business expenses rules. The amount of relief available by way of the special 100 per cent. initial allowance to those who incur capital expenditure on the construction of property within an enterprise zone will depend on how the expenditure is split between business buildings and non-qualifying premises such as residential dwellings.

Planning Applications

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications have been refused by the local authority and subsequently reversed on appeal *(a)* in York and *(b)* nationally for each year since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The information available from the Department's records is given in the table.

Year	Planning appeals Received	Decided	Allowed	Percentage appeals allowed
1985-86				
York	16	14	5	35·7
England	17,839	14,130	5,581	39·5
1986-87				
York	36	21	9	42·8
England	19,856	15,613	6,208	39·8
1987-88				
York	37	38	14	36·8
England	22,482	18,474	6,955	37·6

Recreational Facilities

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what proportion of planning appeals concerning development of recreational open space professional lawyers represented *(a)* developers, *(b)* local authorities, *(c)* sports associations and *(d)* amenity and residents societies, over the most convenient representative period available.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HIP (Lambeth)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the annual housing investment programme approved for the London borough of Lambeth for five years up to and including the financial year 1989-90.

Mr. Trippier: The total housing capital resources allocated to the London borough of Lambeth for these years are as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	34·322
1986-87	35·587
1987-88	33·969
1988-89	30·683
1989-90	22·351

UDCs (Publicity)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of urban development corporation budget in both 1988-89 and 1989-90 is allocated for publicity, information and public relations.

Mr. Trippier: Information for each UDC is as follows:

Publicity/promotion as percentage of total expenditure.

UDC	1988-89	1989-90
Black Country	2·8	3·0
Bristol	16·8	nya
Central Manchester	17·2	7·3
Leeds	8·5	2·2
London Docklands	1·2	0·9
Merseyside	3·3	2·8
Sheffield	0·6	2·4
Teesside	8·2	5·9
Trafford Park	8·6	4·8
Tyne and Wear	7·1	5·8

"Planning Control in Western Europe"

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to make any amendments to the planning system following the publication by his Department of "Planning Control in Western Europe".

Mr. Chope: We have published proposals to simplify and improve the development plan system in the White Paper "The Future of Development Plan"—Cm. 569. The study of planning control in Western Europe does not indicate the need for any immediate additional changes, but it provides valuable information which we shall take into account in our continuing review of the planning system.

UPGs (Lambeth)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the total amount of urban programme grants for the London borough of Lambeth for each of the last five years including the year 1989-90; and if he will indicate the extent to which each year's grant represented an increase or decrease in real terms on the previous year.

Mr. Trippier: The total amount of urban programme grants paid to the London borough of Lambeth in the years 1985-86 to 1988-89 was as follows:

Year	Grant £
1985-86	4,984,243
1986-87	5,070,520
1987-88	5,162,332
1988-89	4,268,983

The amounts paid over to the authority to date are in respect of final claims for 1985-86 and 1986-87. Amounts paid for 1987-88 and 1988-89 are in respect of interim grant claims; final claims have not yet been submitted for these years. All grant claims are subject to audit certification, and none of the above has yet been so certified. Any analysis of increase or decrease in grant levels would be premature.

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to collect the local statistics relating to registration for, and payment of, the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: We are currently considering the information to be collected under the new arrangements.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a decision on the new needs grant assessments under the community charge regulations for England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend will be making decisions this autumn on the new needs assessments to apply in England from 1990-91.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to obtain powers to issue directions to community charge registrars to choose freezing of bank accounts as a method of enforcing either fines for non-registration or for non-payment of the poll tax.

Mr. Gummer: No.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cumulative total of private sector investment committed to urban development corporation projects.

Mr. Trippier: By end of March 1989 over £7 billion of private sector investment had been committed within urban development corporation areas.

Housing Associations

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policies on *(a)* the management of *(b)* the purchase of land by, and *(c)* the introduction of the right to buy in relation to housing associations.

Mr. Trippier: Housing associations are restricted as a condition of grant in what they may pay for land, and purchasing procedures are monitored by the Housing Corporation and by associations' own auditors.

Secure tenants of registered housing associations normally have the right to buy, unless the association is a charity. New lettings by housing associations, as by other private landlords, will be on assured tenancies which do not carry the right to buy.

Local Government Staff

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *22*, he will give for each available category of local government staff the numbers in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989, or the latest date for which figures are available, showing the net and percentage change in each case.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is as follows:

Joint manpower watch (England) annual change in full-time equivalents 1979 to date at December

	FTE's December 1979	*FTE's December 1988*	*Change since December 1979*	
			FTE's	*percentage*
1. General Services				
Education—lecturers and teachers	537,958	502,932	—35,026	—6·5
Education—others	402,409	382,543	—19,866	—4·9
Construction	121,789	100,359	—21,430	—17·6
Transport	20,232	2,592	—17,640	—87·2
Social services	195,182	229,836	34,654	17·8
Public libraries and museums	31,258	33,216	1,958	6·3
Recreation, parks and baths	69,686	74,550	4,864	7·0
Environmental health	20,679	19,130	—1,549	—7·5
Refuse collection and disposal	47,325	34,109	—13,216	—27·9
Housing	48,118	60,957	12,839	26·7
Town and country planning	20,602	21,607	1,005	4·9
Fire service—regular	33,959	34,209	250	0·7
Fire service—others	4,894	5,685	791	16·2
Miscellaneous services	244,500	232,258	—12,242	—5·0
Total	1,798,591	1,733,983	—64,608	—3·6
2. Law and order services				
Police—all ranks	107,027	118,249	11,222	10·5
—cadets	3,600	351	—3,249	—90·3
—traffic wardens	4,113	4,486	373	9·1
—civilians	33,106	40,037	6,931	20·9
Magistrates courts—staff	7,638	9,223	1,585	20·8
Probation staff—officers	4,879	6,343	1,464	30·0
Others	4,207	6,396	2,189	52·0
Total	164,570	185,085	20,515	12·5
3. Agency staff	595	1,644	1,049	176·3
Grand total	1,963,756	1,920,712	—43,044	—2·2

Note: There is likely to have been some reclassification of staff between service categories over this period, so the figures for the two years may not be entirely comparable. Local authority functions have also changed over the period.

Building Regulations

Mr. Tony Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will approve the new building regulations; and when they will come into force.

Mr. Trippier: Consultation papers proposing amendments to five parts of the Building Regulations 1985 and to the approved documents which provide practical guidance on meeting the requirements in them were issued last year. The responses are still under consideration, but I hope that the amending regulations will be laid before Parliament by the summer, and that the amendments will come into operation early next year. The intention is that revised approved documents will be published at the same time the regulations are laid. Consultation papers on other parts of the regulations will be issued during the course of this year, but it is too early to say when these amendments are likely to be made.

BISF-designed Properties

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress his Department has made

with local building societies in Nottingham regarding offering mortgages to those who wish to buy BISF-designed properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Discussions are proceeding, and I hope to make a full statement very shortly.

Goods and Services

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restrictions have been placed in relation to whom they are allowed to provide goods or services on (i) the Crown suppliers, (ii) the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre and (iii) the Property Services Agency's *(a)* project and *(b)* estates services divisions.

Mr. Chope: My reply to my hon. Friend, the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 8 December 1988 at column *273* announced that the Crown Suppliers had been authorised to commence selling to the private sector, as well as to public sector customers. The Queen Elizabeth II conference centre can make its facilities available to any client meeting its standard conditions of hire. I am considering what freedom PSA should have to offer its services to other customers particularly after April 190, when its traditional Government customers are fully untied from the agency and able to buy services from the private sector.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of properties owned by his Department and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Ridley: As at 1 April 1989, 3·2 per cent. of the 433 residential properties owned by the Department of the Environment had been empty for less than a year and 5·5 per cent. for more than a year. Of these 34 per cent. are in the process of disposal on the open market. These properties are located in the following regions of the United Kingdom and local authority areas:

Scotland: Argyll, City of Glasgow, Midlothian, Inverclyde, Motherwell, Banff Buchan.
North East: Hambleton, Langbaurgh.
North West: Manchester.
Eastern: Brentwood, Suffolk Coastal.
London: Westminster.
South West: Cotswold, Isles of Scilly, Sedgemoor.
South East: Medina.

Water Privatisation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will be taking to ensure that the privatised water authorities will not be able to increase the charges being imposed on their customers in order to maximise their market capitalisations when facing takeover bids from other companies.

Mr. Howard: In appointing water and sewerage undertakers under the Water Bill, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make it a condition of appointment that charges do not increase by more than specified amounts above the general rate of inflation. These limits will be subject to review by the Director General of Water Services. Companies will not therefore be able to increase charges above the limits set either by the Secretary of State or the director general in order to defend themselves against takeover bids, nor more generally to compensate for inefficient management.

Pollution Control

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the maximum fine for offences under the Control of Pollution Act.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning to my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) on 22 March 1989 at column *631*.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to charge operators under his proposed system of integrated pollution control.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office have today issued a consultation paper which sets out proposals for a new charging system to recover the costs incurred by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in implementing the system of integrated pollution control (IPC) of the major industrial dischargers of air and water pollutants and wastes.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's costs in granting integrated authorisations, sampling and monitoring discharges and enforcing the controls will be borne by the dischargers themselves rather than the general taxpayers, as happens at present.

This is an important extension of the principle that polluters should pay the costs of protecting the environment from their activities.

The proposed charges would cover about 70 to 75 per cent. of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's total expenditures associated with integrated pollution control. They would fully recover the costs of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's authorisation and inspection functions under IPC. They would not cover such Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution activities as support for policy development that serve wider Government objectives.

In working up these proposals, the Departments have paid particular attention to ensuring that the system is both practicable to administer and equitable. So a large site with a higher potential to pollute would pay substantially more than a smaller, less-polluting site.

Similar cost-recovery charging systems are levied in other European countries such as Germany and France.

The Government will finalise the details of the charging scheme in the light of the views expressed by interested bodies in response to this consultation paper.

North West Water

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment under what authority the financial director and corporate affairs manager have been appointed to North West Water plc; what are their salaries; and who is paying their salaries.

Mr. Howard: The appointments to which the hon. Member refers have been made by North West water

authority to the posts of financial director and corporate affairs manager in the authority. It is envisaged that the appointees will continue to fill these posts in North West Water plc when that company is established under the provisions of the Water Bill. Staff salaries are the responsibility of the authority.

Council Tenants (Opting-out)

Ms. Mowlam: to ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total cost of the advertising campaign advertising the rights of council tenants to opt out of local authority control.

Mr. Trippier: A total of £524,000.

Ms. Mowlam: to ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of the advertisements advertising the rights of council tenants to opt out of local authority control carried in the Sunday newspapers on 26 March.

Mr. Trippier: Approximately £77,600.

Art and Culture (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: to ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policies and proposals in his draft planning guidance he has put forward for the future development of art and cultural facilities in London.

Mr. Chope: None.

Waste Disposal (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: to ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment in his draft planning guidance he has made of the transport and land use implications of the activities of the 16 waste disposal authorities in London; and what proposals he has made for their co-ordination.

Mr. Chope: This is a matter for the waste disposal authorities and the London waste regulation authority. Policies may be included in unitary development plans as appropriate.

Town Centres (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: to ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the future of strategic town centres in London; and what guidance he is offering the London boroughs in respect of their long-term development.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has considered the advice on strategic centres put forward by the London planning advisory committee. He does not consider that strategic centres should be designated in the guidance.

Leisure (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: to ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policies and proposals in his draft planning guidance he has put forward for the development of recreation, sport and other leisure facilities in London.

Mr. Chope: Guidance is proposed on the recreational use of green belt and open land. Provision for recreation, sport and other leisure development is in general a matter for individual boroughs.

Transport (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what priorities he has set out for transport investment by the London boroughs in his planning guidance.

Mr. Chope: It is for the boroughs to determine their own priorities for future investment in their roads through their annual transport policies and programme submissions to the Secretary of State for Transport. The purpose of strategic planning guidance is to assist the boroughs to prepare their unitary development plans. The draft guidance proposes that these plans should describe boroughs' schemes and networks in accordance with their local road hierarchy and in relation to the strategic London road network.

River Thames

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals and policies are included in his planning guidance in respect of the river Thames for *(a)* co-ordinating development along its banks, *(b)* improving public access and *(c)* promoting its use for freight, passenger services and leisure use.

Mr. Chope: The draft strategic guidance says that boroughs should give particulr attention to the character of any development proposals on or near the river Thames. They should aim to maintain and improve public access, and bear in mind the Countryside Commission's proposed Thames path when preparing their unitary development plans. The promotion of freight, passenger services and leisure use are not matters for strategic guidance.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has considered designating the river Thames as metropolitan open land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The proposed policies for metropolitan open land set out in draft strategic guidance are not in general applicable to the river Thames.

Conservation (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy for conserving and protecting London's areas of special character.

Mr. Chope: Such areas can be protected by existing conservation and planning policies. The boroughs concerned should take these policies into account when preparing their unitary development plans.

Water Authorities Association (Advertising)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the amounts expended by the Water Authorities Association on *(a)* press advertising, *(b)* television advertising and *(c)* other advertising in each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Howard: This is a matter for the Water Authorities Association.

Housing (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policies and proposals are contained within his draft strategic planning guidance for London designed to improve access to affordable housing.

Mr. Chope: The draft guidance refers to the part that the planning system can play in alleviating the problems of access to housing by ensuring that there is an adequate and continuing supply of land for new housing; and that local policies allow for conversions of existing houses into smaller units and for redevelopment at higher densities where appropriate.

Business Development (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific locational advice he has given London boroughs for future business development apart from central London and docklands in his planning guidance.

Mr. Chope: The draft guidance proposes that boroughs should adopt a positive, flexible and realistic approach to business development throughout London. Planning policies for particular locations are a matter for the boroughs concerned, not central Government.

Footpaths

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for the latest convenient period for which figures are available, the number of letters received by his Department's offices in Bristol concerning footpaths on an average working day, the number replied to each day and the number which do not receive a reply within four weeks.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Figures are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Water Treatment Works

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet been able to consider the responses of the water authorities in England and Wales and the Water Companies Association following his request for each utility to carry out a thorough review of their management and operating procedures at water treatment works, particularly unmanned installations, as a consequence of the incident at the Lowermoor works of the South West water authority last summer.

Mr. Howard: Yes. We have received and considered the responses and I am pleased to report that a number of improvements have been made to procedures following the Lowermoor incident.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, asked water authorities to review, in particular, the matters set out on which separate comments are given.

(i) *Waterworks Site Security.* There have been some changes in key systems to ensure that access to installations is better controlled. The possible use of electronic systems is being considered in some cases together with improvements in boundary fencing.

(ii) *Procedures for Receiving Chemicals at Works.* Labelling of installations has been checked and improved where necessary, as have controls for receiving chemicals.

(iii) *Remote Monitoring of the Final Treated Water.* Additional monitors have been introduced, or are being considered. In addition, the Water Research Centre is doing work in this area to try to ensure that any accidental contamination of the water supply is detected before it reaches the consumer.

(iv) *Internal Reporting Arrangements for Incidents.* Greater emphasis is being given to ensuring that emergency reporting lines are clear and co-ordinated and that senior management is informed immediately of an incident that might result in contamination of public water supplies.

(v) *Emergency Procedures, Including Liaison with all those concerned with Public Health Issues.* Utilities have reviewed their procedures to take account of the lessons to be learned from the Lowermoor incident. In most cases, review is a regular practice. In particular, links with those concerned with public health issues have been reviewed and reinforced where necessary.

(vi) *Other Issues.* My right hon. Friend also asked the utilities to consider the usefulness of employing a technique known as the Hazard Study Technique, designed to predict the outcome of potential systems failures and to ensure that all systems are fail-safe. A number of the utilities are considering using this method, if they do not already do so. Many utilities inform consumers of matters such as the undesirability of consuming water from the hot tap or have proposals to do so. The prevalence of this unsatisfactory practice was one of the revelations arising from the Lowermoor incident.

Pollution incidents like Lowermoor are rare. But even one is one too many. It is vitally important that suppliers of drinking water take all reasonable measures to avoid such occurrences and that they are constantly alert and prepared to deal with any incident. This position can be secured only through regular review; learning from one's own and others' problems; and by holding regular exercises to ensure that staff are ready and trained to respond quickly and effectively to any incident that might affect water supply.

I am most encouraged by the responses that we have received following the reviews that have just been undertaken.

Tyne and Wear (Development Plans)

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the preparation of unitary development plans for Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has today issued strategic guidance to assist the five metropolitan districts in Tyne and Wear in the preparation of unitary development plans for their area. The guidance covers the key issues identified by the local authorities and the Department—urban regeneration, retailing, transport and the environment.

A draft of the guidance was circulated for comment in December 1988. Comments were received from 47 organisations and individuals. The guidance has been revised in the light of these comments. A copy of the strategic guidance, together with a report on the consultation exercise, have today been placed in the Library of the House. Following the issue of the strategic guidance, commencement orders will be issued shortly to enable the local authorities to start work on preparing their unitary development plans.

Young People (Accommodation)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has in respect of the number of 16 to 18-year-olds who live *(a)* with their parents, *(b)* in private rented accommodation, *(c)* in council accommodation, *(d)* in hostels, *(e)* in bed and breakfast or other board and lodging establishments and *(f)* sleeping rough.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The most recent estimates for the first three parts of the question are from the 1987 labour force survey. This shows *(a)* 2,030,000 16 to 18-year-olds living with their parents, *(b)* 40,000 in private rented accommodation (not with their parents), *(c)* 40,000 in council accommodation (not with their parents). The other numbers requested are not available.

Council House Sales

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council properties have been sold to council house tenants in Kirklees since 1979 to the latest year for which figures are available; what this is of the total stock; and how much income this has generated for the local authorities as a result of these sales.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Some 3,500 sales to sitting tenants have been reported by Kirklees district council between April 1979 and the end of December 1986; this is about 9 per cent. of the average stock over the period since 1979; the reported sales had a capital value (net of discount) of over £21 million. No returns of sales to sitting tenants have been received by the Department since December 1986.

Parish Councils

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish his estimates of the income raised for a 1p rate on the non-domestic properties in all parish council areas in 1989-90;

(2) if he will publish his estimates of the total amount of business rate income available to parish councils in 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* This information is not available.

Rate Relief

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has any plans to change the operation of rate relief for non-profit making sports clubs with the introduction of the community charge in April 1990.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* On the introduction of the uniform business rate, local authorities will continue to have discretion to give up to 100 per cent. rate relief to non-profit making sports clubs. We are currently consulting the local authority associations and other interested bodies about how the cost of such relief should be borne.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information the Crown Suppliers privatisation unit has provided to those firms or groups who have expressed interest in purchasing the Crown Suppliers; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Chope: Following my announcement of 28 July, a number of firms and groups interested in purchasing the Crown Suppliers were sent a copy of that announcement, a copy of "The Crown Suppliers' Annual Report and Accounts for 1987" (already in the Library) and an information memorandum prepared by Samuel Montagu and Co. Ltd. I am arranging for copies of the information memorandum to be placed in the Library shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 21 April 1989

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Registration Numbers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column 595, if he will describe the circumstances in which he allows the police access to the vehicle registration numbers in his possession in order to trace the owner of a particular vehicle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Regulation 15 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 1971 requires the Secretary of State to supply to the police, free of charge, such particulars as may be requested of any vehicle contained in the DVLC vehicle register. In practice the police national computer contains a register of vehicles and keepers including much of the information on the DVLC record, from which it is updated on a daily basis. Other vehicles information available to DVLC is provided to the police on request.

Regulation 15, which permits the release of this information takes precedence over the Data Protection Act 1984 provisions. Section 34(1) of that Act exempts the data held by this Department which is required to be made available by other enactments. Notwithstanding this exemption the DVLC has registered its computer data under the the Data Protection Act 1984 and adheres closely to the data protection principles.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column 595, if he will describe the circumstances in which the police or security services could have access to the vehicle registration numbers collected by Autoguide or similar traffic systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The operation of a driver information system which was licensed under the Road Traffic (Driver Licensing and Information Systems) Bill would have to comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984. Sections 27 and 28 of the Act are concerned with national security and with crime and taxation.

Vehicles (East Sussex)

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles in each band of excise duty are registered at addresses in East Sussex.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At the December 1988 census there were 313,279 licensed vehicles registered in East Sussex. These are analysed by tax class groups as follows:

	Number
Private and Light Goods	280,024
Motorcycles, Scooters etc	12,172
Farmers Goods	580
General Goods	6,802
Exempt Vehicles (Emergency services, specialist road construction etc)	3,862
Exempt Vehicles (limited mileage on public roads section 7(1) Vehicle Excise Act)	260
Electric Vehicles	224
Hackney (taxis, buses)	1,560
Others	4,370
Unlicensed (used on private roads)	3,425

TSG and Capital Allocations

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to make any additional allocations for 1989-90 in respect of TSG and capital allocations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The amount of transport supplementary grant payable to local highway authorities for 1989-90 was determined at the time of the annual settlement. It cannot be changed.

Capital allocations for roads in 1989-90 have also been settled. However, supplementary capital allocations may be made if any of the resources earmarked for a highway project of national or regional importance, or for other local transport projects, are not in the event needed. It is too soon to say if there are likely to be such supplementary allocations this year.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the original forecast dates for improvements to trunk roads and local authority roads in connection with the Channel tunnel in Kent and East Sussex; and what is the latest revised forecast completion dates.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is not the Department's practice generally to give forecast completion dates for trunk road schemes in preparation since they are subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and detailed design. We have the Channel tunnel in mind in our planning and we aim to complete the major improvements in Kent and East Sussex as soon as possible.

The Maidstone to Ashford section of the M20 motorway is under construction. It is due for completion by mid-1991.

Local authority roads are the responsibility of Kent and East Sussex county councils.

M25

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have been killed and seriously injured on the M25 over the last 12 months.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Too many.

Provisional figures for the 12 months December 1987 to November 1988 show that there were 28 people killed and 130 seriously injured on the M25 motorway. More recent figures are not yet available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Attorney-General how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and

7 respectively, and overall in the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Treasury Solicitor's Department respectively, are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

The Attorney-General: The table shows the number and percentage of women in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 in the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

	Lord Chancellor's Department		*Treasury Solicitor's Department*	
Grade	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0
3	0	0	1	10
4	0	0	0	0
5	2	7·1	3	7·7
6	14	25·5	16	29·6
7	27	21·3	8	20·0

A total of 5·6 per cent. of respondents to a survey of ethnic origins carried out in the Lord Chancellor's Department in 1988 were members of ethnic minority groups; the number of respondents in grades 1 to 7 is insufficient to provide reliable figures.

Two officers at grade 6, representing 3·7 per cent., and three officers at grade 7, representing 7·5 per cent. of staff at those grades in the Treasury Solicitor's Department are members of ethnic minority groups.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Attorney-General when the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Treasury Solicitor's Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department and the Treasury Solicitor's Department completed the surveys of the ethnic origin of their employees in 1988, and continue to monitor the ethnic origin of all recruits to the Departments.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

The Attorney-General: The Civil Service Commission recruits by fair and open competition all staff graded executive officer and above. Thereafter, promotion is dependent upon performance in the grade and consideration of the officer's ability to perform the duties of the higher grade through Departmental procedures designed to test these criteria. The Civil Service is an equal opportunities employer and the ethnic origin of the officer plays no part in recruitment or promotion procedures.

Legal Aid

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Attorney-General how much has been paid each year in Northern Ireland during the past 10 years from the legal aid fund; and how many Queen's counsel, junior counsel and solicitors have received such payments in each year.

The Attorney-General: The figures for payments out of the legal aid fund for each of the financial years from 1978-79 to 1987-88 for each category of legal aid are as follows:

	Solicitors' fees £	*Counsels' fees* £	*Disbursements* £	*Total* £
1978-79	593,773	334,672	151,142	1,079,587
1979-80	863,589	486,749	219,822	1,570,160
1980-81	1,209,249	659,971	284,143	2,153,363
1981-82	1,091,013	638,138	283,910	2,013,061
1982-83	1,606,005	645,793	389,173	2,640,971
1983-84	2,603,707	1,365,494	646,844	4,616,045
1984-85	2,221,995	1,193,056	608,699	4,023,750
1985-86	2,494,360	1,776,113	772,643	5,043,116
1986-87	2,450,505	1,538,623	756,001	4,745,129
1987-88	2,907,512	1,631,829	799,600	5,338,941
Totals	18,041,708	10,270,438	4,911,977	33,224,123

Legal aid in civil proceedings

	Solicitors' and Counsels' fees £	*Disbursements* £	*Total* £
1978-79	200,952	49,296	250,248
1979-80	247,740	68,552	316,292
1980-81	388,026	51,338	439,364
1981-82	343,472	112,240	455,712
1982-83	388,300	150,842	539,142
1983-84	468,294	209,513	677,807
1984-85	542,362	228,372	770,734
1985-86	951,040	360,727	1,311,767
1986-87	1,167,262	435,749	1,603,011
1987-88	1,217,467	489,326	1,706,793
Totals	5,914,915	2,155,955	8,070,870

Legal advice and assistance

	Total £
1978-79	30,640
1979-80	96,249
1980-81	170,097
1981-82	214,980
1982-83	312,025
1983-84	384,548
1984-85	477,251
1985-86	732,313
1986-87	806,432
1987-88	1,212,649
Total	4,443,184

Assistance by way of representation

	Solicitors' fees £	*Counsels' Fees* £	*Total* £
1980-81[1]	12,683	2,690	15,373
1981-1982	177,694	37,692	215,386
1982-1983	334,772	70,829	405,601
1983-1984	408,666	89,921	498,587
1984-1985	350,593	82,961	433,554
1985-1986	525,998	119,056	645,054
1986-1987	755,986	162,634	918,620
1987-1988	757,215	161,247	918,462
Totals	3,323,607	727,030	4,050,637

[1] This scheme commenced in November 1980.
Total expenditure over the period = £49,788,814.
Information on the number of Queen's counsel, junior counsel an solicitors who have received payments in each of the years is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Frederick Andrews

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has as to why the Official Solicitor in Northern Ireland refuses to make available copies of the financial records of Frederick Andrews, 1978 No. 516, to his family; and what information he has on the alleged mismanagement of the affairs of mental patient Frederick Andrews, 1978 No. 516, since he was placed under the Care and Protection Office.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to my earlier replies to him about this case on 25 February 1988, at columns *257-59*. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on this case.

Baby C

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to arrange for a full investigation into the public interest implications of the case heard recently by Mr. Justice Ward in the family division of the High Court in Leeds relating to the treatment of baby C; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor is having inquiries made into the background to these proceedings, including obtaining a copy of any judgment, and will consider what implications there may be.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General if he will call for a report from the Official Solicitor into the public interest implications of the recent handling in the Leeds High Court of the case on behalf of baby C.

The Attorney-General: It is not part of the Official Solicitor's normal functions to report on the public interest implications of an individual case in which he is involved. The Lord Chancellor is, however, having inquiries made into the background of these proceedings, including obtaining a copy of any judgment, and will consider what implications there may be.

Wards of Court

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions over the last 12 months for which figures are available the medical evidence submitted in proceedings in the High Court in Leeds in cases pertaining to the medical treatment of wards of court has been withheld from the public and the media.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not available but generally it is the practice for the courts hearing wardship cases to sit in private.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions over the last 12 months for which figures are available proceedings in the High Court in Leeds pertaining to the medical treatment of wards of court have been held in camera.

The Attorney-General: This information is not available but the general practice of the courts is to hear wardship cases in private.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make it his policy to ensure that the Official Solicitor routinely seeks a second medical opinion when he is acting on behalf of minors who are wards of court in proceedings pertaining to their access to medical treatment.

The Attorney-General: Where an independent medical report is needed in relation to wardship proceedings in which the Official Solicitor is acting as the ward's guardian ad litem, subject to the court's permission he routinely obtains one.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to request a report from Mr. Justice Ward of the family division of the Leeds High Court into the public interest implications of his reported decision to instruct doctors to treat a ward of court to die.

The Attorney-General: No. The exercise of the wardship jurisdiction is a judicial function and it would not therefore be appropriate for any member of the Government to ask a judge to report to him on any aspect of his decision in an individual case. The Lord Chancellor is, however, having inquiries made into the background to these proceedings, including obtaining a copy of any judgment, and will consider what implications there may be.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

House of Fraser

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement setting out the reasons why he did not previously refer the House of Fraser report to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* As my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has indicated in another place, in his view there are no public interest grounds for such a reference.

ENERGY

Public Service Broadcasts

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will assess the likely implications for the transmission by Channel 4 of public service broadcasts emanating from his Department of the White Paper, "Broadcasting in the 90s: Competition, Choice and Quality".

Mr. Parkinson: There is no reason to suppose that the proposals in the White Paper will alter the present arrangements whereby public service messages are broadcast by Channel 4. The arrangements for paid Government advertising on television will not be affected by the proposals.

Yorkshire Coal

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will take steps to ensure a long-term supply contract for Yorkshire coal between British Coal and the Central Electricity Generating Board for export and to other outlets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have already made it clear that, while the new generating companies are likely to wish to buy a significant proportion of their coal needs on a contractual basis, the proportion of coal sold on contract and the length of the contracts is a matter for commercial negotiation, as in other sectors of the coal market.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq (Weapons)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government propose to change their current policy of prohibiting the export to Iraq of any weapon which could enhance its offensive capability, or will agree to granting export licences for the supply of weaponry to Iraq, to accommodate United Kingdom exhibitors at the first Baghdad international exhibition for military procurement; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government have not changed their policy on defence sales to Iraq. Applications for export licences continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis, according to the guidelines as announced in the House by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on 29 October 1985 at column *454*, and in the light of developments in the peace negotiations with Iran.

Engagements

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what are her criteria for deciding whether to give priority engagements at home or abroad over being present to answer questions in the House on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The Prime Minister: I am present in the House to answer questions on Tuesdays and Thursdays as often as possible.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Sylvan High School

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he intends to take to consult the parents, pupils and staff of Sylvan high school about the proposal by the London borough of Croydon to close the school.

Mrs. Rumbold: Any local authority wishing to close a school must follow the statutory procedures laid down by the Education Acts. Under section 12 of the Education Act 1980, authorities must publish their proposals and submit a copy to my right hon. Friend. There follows a two-month period during which statutory objections can be submitted to the local education authority. Proposals concerning county schools fall to my right hon. Friend to decide if statutory objections have been submitted or if he exercises his power to call them in. In making his decision on proposals which fall to him to decide, my right hon. Friend weighs carefully the views expressed by those who support or oppose the proposals. My right hon. Friend expects the local education authority concerned—in this case, the London borough of Croydon—to have carried out appropriate consultation with those affected before publishing proposals.

Qualifications (Statutory Approval)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is his policy, in relation to the proposed circular on statutory approval of qualifications under the Education Reform Act, on approving the continuation for 1989-90 of existing two-year courses; whether he intends to approve all existing courses for 1989-90 in order to enable pupils to complete courses they have already started; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the efficacy of the arrangements made by his Department and the Schools Examination and Assessment Council to draw up a complete list of existing two-year courses for the purpose of enabling their completion by pupils before August 1990; what arrangements he proposes to make regarding *(a)* the statutory approval of any courses that prove to have been omitted from the first list to be approved and *(b)* enforcement of the relevant provisions of the Education Reform Act concerning unapproved courses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I shall exercise my powers under section 5 of the Education Reform Act 1988 to approve qualifications on the advice of the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC). I expect shortly to receive the council's advice about qualifications for certification in July 1990 and July 1991. In considering that advice, I shall naturally have careful regard to the implications for pupils and schools. I expect to reach decisions next month. Those decisions will be made public and my Department will simultaneously issue a circular describing the basis on which they were arrived at and the procedures for implementation.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the overall cost to his Department, the Schools Examination and Assessment Council, local education authorities and schools of the recent draft circular on statutory approval of qualifications; what proportion of this overall cost relates to the list A compilation of courses which are to be given temporary approval for 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: A number of staff in my Department, the School Examinations and Assessment Council, local education authorities and schools have contributed to drawing up and responding to the draft circular on the approval of qualifications. That work in the great majority of cases represents a negligible addition to the duties of those at each level in the education system responsible for the administration of examinations. It would therefore not be meaningful to assess additional

costs associated with that work, still less with any particular aspect of it; and to seek to do so would itself involve the Department and others in disproportionate cost. The cost of printing the draft circular was £3,410.

School Governors

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received representations concerning the increase in responsibilities placed upon school governors.

Mrs. Rumbold: There have been some representations on this point. But the successful recruitment of thousands of new governors last year suggests that they are not daunted by their new responsibilities. The Government are working to ensure that school governors get the support and training that they need to carry out their role effectively.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he proposes to review the method of assessing potential income from disposal of assets when making future capital allocations.

Mrs. Rumbold: From April 1990 the proposed new system of local authority capital finance, as outlined in the Local Government and Housing Bill, will allow Ministers, when determining annual capital guidelines and corresponding credit approvals, to take into account the ability of individual authorities to spend from their capital receipts.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Brazil

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish his response to the Amnesty International report entitled, "Brazil, Authorised Violence in Rural Areas"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the allegations in the report with the former Brazilian Justice Minister when he visited Brazil in November 1988. The gist of this conversation was passed to Amnesty International last year. As we have told Amnesty International, we have no doubt that the case descriptions in the report are broadly accurate. But it is quite a different matter to assert that the federal government in Brazilia connives at the killings. We believe that Amnesty International may have overstated its case on this.

Economic Commission for Europe

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the names of the United Kingdom representatives attending the plenary session of the Economic Commission for Europe in 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom representatives attending the annual session (including the plenary and sessional committee) of the Economic Commission for Europe in 1989 are:

Mr. J. A. Sankey CMG, the United Kingdom permanent representative to the office of the United Nations at Geneva.
Mr. G. W. Hewitt, deputy permanent representative to the office of the United Nations at Geneva.
Mr. J. R. McCulloch, first secretary at the United Kingdom mission to the office of the United Nations at Geneva.
Mr. S. Wall, second secretary at the United Kingdom mission to the office of the United Nations at Geneva.

United Nations Organisation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the United Kingdom's contributions to the United Nations Organisation, and to its agencies, in each of the years from 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Until 1987 no central record was kept of Her Majesty's Government's contributions through various Government Departments to the United Nations and its agencies. Since then the figures have been centrally collated and are set out in the table:

United Kingdom contributions to the United Nations regular budget and the specialised agencies from 1985-88

(£ million)[1]

Year	*United Nations regular budget*	*United Nations agencies regular budgets*	*United Nations separate peace-keeping forces (UNDOF, UNIFIL and UNFICYP)*[2]	*United Nations agencies voluntary contributions*	*Total*
1985	24·63	35·57	31·49	62·26	153·95
1986	23·62	27·11	31·41	60·34	[4]142·49
1987	21·50	29·23	29·23	81·57	161·52
1988	19·36	31·72	[3]32·26	81·73	165·07

[1]Because of different accounting periods of Her Majesty's Government and United Nations Bodies, exchange rate fluctuations and extraordinary items, such as donations to appeals following natural disasters, these figures, although a best estimate, should not be taken as definitive.

[2]United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), Syria/Israel.
United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).
United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

[3]Includes United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) contribution. UNIIMOG commenced operation on 9 August 1988.

[4]Apparent decrease due to sharp decline in United States dollar.

Council of Europe

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the measures being taken to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Council of Europe.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will represent the Government at the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 5 May 1989. I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 14 February.

Vietnamese Refugees

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking to help Hong Kong cope with the problem of Vietnamese refugees in the territory.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am very conscious of the financial burden that has been imposed on the territory by Vietnamese boat people. I have, therefore, decided that the Government should make a contribution of up to £6 million in response to an international appeal which UNHCR will shortly launch for funds to meet the capital costs of Pillar Point, a new refugee centre which the Hong Kong Government are constructing in the territory for refugees awaiting resettlement. This underlines our firm intention to help Hong Kong deal with this immensely difficult humanitarian problem in every way we can.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fair Employment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the employers in Northern Ireland the Fair Employment Agency has *(a)* chosen or *(b)* had discussions with to revoke or modify directions previously given under subsection 2(i) or 2(ii) under part II, section 13(5)(a) or (b) of the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 1976 to date.

Mr. Viggers: Following is the information requested.

Cookstown district council.
Armagh district council.
Lough Neagh fishermen's co-operative.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the number and type of cases referred under the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 1976 to the county court, the number and *(b)* type of findings upheld or overturned by the court and the employers concerned; and if he will place in the Library copies of the judgments in each case.

Mr. Viggers: The tables provide details of cases heard by the county court. It is not normal practice to place judgments in the Library but they may be obtained on request from the county court, Courthouse, Crumlin road, Belfast.

Table 1

Appeals to county court	*Total*	*Settled out of court*	*Findings upheld*	*Findings overturned*	*Result unknown*	*Withdrawn*
Appeals by respondent under section 28(2)	37	20	6	8	3	—
Appeals by complainant under section 28(3)	22	3	6	1	11	1

Table 2

Appeals by respondents against FEA findings of discrimination under section 28(2) of The Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976

Date appeals lodged	*Organisation involved*	*Outcome of appeal (findings upheld or overturned)*
November 1977	Civil Service Commission	Overturned
December 1978	Craigavon Borough Council	[1]Overturned
January 1979	Newry and Mourne District Council	Overturned
May 1979	Craigavon Borough Council	Overturned
September 1981	Armagh District Council	[2]Upheld
November 1981	Lisburn Borough Council	Upheld
December 1984	Southern Health and Social Services	Overturned
April 1985	Derry City Council	Overturned
April 1985	Northern Ireland Electricity	[3]Overturned
February 1986	Department of Environment (NI)	Overturned
August 1986	Southern Health and Social Services Board	Upheld
November 1986	The Village Inn	Upheld
May 1987	Ministry of Defence	Upheld

[1] Original FEA findings upheld by Court of Appeal.
[2] Original FEA findings overturned by Court of Appeal.
[3] FEA appeal pending at Court of Appeal.

Table 3

Appeals by complainants against FEA findings of no discrimination under section 28(3) of The Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976

Date appeal lodged	*Respondent organisation*	*Outcome of appeal (findings upheld or overturned)*
June 1979	Department of Health and Social Services	Upheld
July 1984	Department of the Environment	Upheld
October 1984	F. A. Wellworth Co. Ltd.	Upheld
January 1985	Anglo Irish Meats	Overturned
November 1985	Short Brothers Plc	Upheld
April 1986	NI Postal and Telecommunications Board	Upheld
June 1988	Belfast City Council	Upheld

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which employers have made a compensatory payment to a complainant under the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 1976; and what were the sums involved in each case, the original date of each settlement and the eventual date of payment, from 1976 to the present time.

Mr. Viggers: This is a matter for the chairman of the Fair Employment Agency. I understand that there have been 41 cases, the details of which are in the following

table. It would not be in the best interests of the work of the agency to release the names of parties involved in the cases under section 24 of the Act.

Respondent	*Date of settlement*	*Date of Payment*	*Amount*
Food, Drink and Tobacco	22 September 1980	7 October 1980	780·00
Textile and Clothing	14 January 1982	3 March 1982	750·00
Construction	6 June 1981	10 March 1982	500·00
Manufacturing	11 June 1982	18 July 1982	5,500·00
Local Authority	6 August 1982	26 August 1982	1,000·00
Other Employer	14 September 1982	16 September 1982	550·00
Health and Social Services Board	27 August 1982	22 September 1982	4,350·00
Local Authority	30 November 1982	22 December 1982	3,000·00
Other Public Body	19 October 1983	14 November 1983	1,500·00
Food, Drink and Tobacco	25 October 1983	17 November 1983	1,500·00
Local Authority	20 October 1983	2 December 1983	1,500·00
Other Public Body	24 October 1983	22 December 1983	2,500·00
Health and Social Services Board	25 January 1984	9 March 1984	1,400·00
Vocational Organisation	7 March 1984	3 May 1984	10,000·00
Education and Library Board	8 June 1984	12 October 1984	1,500·00
Vocational Organisation	26 October 1984	15 November 1984	250·00
Vocational Organisation	26 October 1984	15 November 1984	250·00
Vocational Organisation	26 October 1984	15 November 1984	250·00
Distributive	6 December 1984	14 December 1984	350·00
Other Employer	1 May 1985	2 May 1985	1,000·00
Food, Drink and Tobacco	8 November 1985	20 December 1985	2,100·00
Education and Library Board	not available	11 April 1986	2,000·00
Engineering	not available	15 October 1986	507·50
Engineering	not available	15 October 1986	510·00
Other Employer	not available	30 October 1986	4,900·00
Education and Library Board	not available	18 November 1986	4,759·04
Education and Library Board	not available	12 May 1987	3,279·48
Local Authority	13 May 1987	17 June 1987	1,500·00
Other Employer	13 May 1987	23 June 1987	1,892·28
Education and Library Board	not available	13 October 1987	2,035·26
Local Authority	not available	12 November 1987	3,425·75
Manufacturing	16 November 1987	19 November 1987	2,350·00
Manufacturing	not available	28 November 1987	5,000·00
Construction	not available	22 December 1987	3,500·00
Engineering	5 January 1988	5 January 1988	2,000·00
Health and Social Services Board	not available	3 February 1988	1,673·80
Health and Social Services Board	not available	29 March 1988	4,000·00
Other Employer	not available	8 April 1988	1,000·00
Education and Library Board	not available	14 April 1988	3,541·09
Education and Library Board	not available	17 October 1988	2,397·29
Local Authority	not available	3 April 1989	19,319·57

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints under section 24 of the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 1976, of unlawful discrimination the Fair Employment Agency has declined to pursue; and what reasons have been given in each case.

Mr. Viggers: I understand from the chairman of the Fair Employment Agency that the agency has declined to pursue 137 complaints under section 24 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976 for the reasons specified:

	Number
(1) Adjudged Frivolous	35
(2) Outside the time limits	71
(3) Outside the Scope of the Legislation	15
(4) Considered by another Statutory Body	1
(5) Failure by Complainant to provide sufficient information	15

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints under section 24 of the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 1976, have been made against *(a)* public bodies, and *(b)* private employers; and what has been the outcome in each case.

Mr. Viggers: The position as at 31 March 1989 is shown in the following table:

	Private Sector	*Public Sector*	*Trade Unions*
Total Number of Complaints	391	432	3
Unlawful Discrimination	26	32	1
No Discrimination	190	208	2
Section 42	1	26	—
Section 52	—	1	—
Withdrawn or not pursued	103	112	—
Outstanding	71	53	—

The agency's annual reports, which are available in the Library, contain an account of investigations under section 24 of the Act.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints by year under the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 1976 have been discontinued by virtue of section 42 of the Act, listing the employing body in each case and the religious affiliation of the complainant.

Mr. Viggers: The recorded number of section 42 certificates signed by Northern Ireland Office Ministers in each year since 1976 is as follows:

Year	Number
1976	0
1977	1
1978	3
1979	0
1980	1
1981	3
1982	1
1983	1
1984	3
1985	1
1986	1
1987	2
1988	5
1989	1

Nine cases involved either the Northern Ireland Office or Northern Ireland Departments whilst the other 14 involved public bodies in Northern Ireland. It is understood that of the complainants involved, 20 were Roman Catholic and three were Protestants.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many subscribers there have been in Northern Ireland to the register for equal opportunity employers and organisations for each quarter since 30 April 1988; and how many of such subscribers have been removed from the register each quarter since since this date.

Mr. Viggers: The number of subscribers at the end of each quarter is as follows:

Quarter ended	Number of subscribers
31 July 1988	9,630
31 October 1988	9,817
31 January 1989	10,024
31 March 1989 (two month period only)	10,181

No subscribers have been removed from the register in this period.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the most recent unemployment rates by Belfast local government district wards in percentage and numerical terms.

Mr. Viggers: The numbers unemployed in each ward, within the Belfast district council area, at 9 March 1989, are as follows. Unemployment rates are available only for travel-to-work areas.

Numbers unemployed in Belfast district council area, by ward, at 9 March 1989

Ward	Number
Sydenham	332
Island	507
Ballymacarret	648
Bloomfield	346
Ballyhackamore	317
Belmont	296
Stormont	136
Cherryvalley	238
Knock	248
Orangefield	206
The Mount	652
Woodstock	452
Ravenhill	277
Ballynafeigh	457
Rosetta	228
Upper Malone	200
Finaghy	225
Blackstaff	488
Malone	348
Stranmillis	229
Windsor	470
Botanic	1,250
Shaftesbury	679
Ladybrook	616
Glencolin	948
Andersonstown	559
Glen Road	796
Falls Park	709
Upper Springfield	1,097
Whiterock	988
Beechmount	636
Highfield	487
Glencairn	556
Woodvale	406
Crumlin	451
Shankill	497
Clonard	848
Falls	878
St. Annes	813
New Lodge	959
Duncairn	541
Waterworks	883
Ardoyne	983
Ligoniel	400
Ballysillan	381
Cliftonville	484
Chichester Park	513
Fortwilliam	279
Cavehill	231
Castleview	353
Bellevue	310
TOTAL	26,831

Investment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the level of investment by *(a)* United States companies, *(b)* the European Economic Community and regional development agencies and *(c)* other public sector sources since 1980, indicating the numbers employed in each case.

Mr. Viggers: The level of investment and the numbers of jobs assisted since 1980 are:

Investment	Jobs assisted
(a) United States companies	
£397·5 million	21,253
(b) European Economic Community and Regional Development Agencies	
EEC	
£55·60 million	30,630
Department of Commerce/IDB	
£723·9 million	111,056
LEDU	
£144·887 million	33,256
(c) Other Public Sector Sources	
DED Assistance to Harland & Wolff and Shorts	
£533·1 million	12,371

Government Aid

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by country of origin the firms in receipt of Government assistance that have opened or closed in Northern Ireland for the period for which details are available and the date of their opening and closure.

Mr. Viggers: The following list shows firms by country of origin which have opened since 1972 with assistance from the Industrial Development Board or its predecessor, the Department of Commerce. Those marked by [1] subsequently closed. The dates of opening and closure are not readily available and to identify them would involve disproportionate cost.

In addition, since 1979, the local enterprise development unit has assisted 4,011 small firms to begin operating. These were almost exclusively of Northern Ireland origin, and in many cases one-man businesses. Identification of these firms individually would entail disproportionate cost. Information on LEDU-assisted firms which closed in the period is not available.

COMPANIES WHICH HAVE OPENED IN NORTHERN IRELAND SINCE 1972 SHOWING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Northern Ireland

Texmotif Ltd.
Maydown Precision Engineering Ltd.
Tirnanog Ltd.[1]
Wilson Double-Deck Trailers Ltd.
Sandown Private Nursing Homes Ltd.
Sefco Engineering Ltd.
Samson Yarns Ltd.
Euro-Shellfish Ltd.
Tri-sum Snacks Ltd.
Flax Fibres Ltd.[1]
Plashapes Ltd.
North Star Plastics Ltd.
Cookstown Meats Ltd.
Ivex Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
Merm Ltd.
Tamnaharry Developments Ltd.
Lenticle Ltd.[1]
John Cleland and Sons (Labels) Ltd.
John Finlay (Site Handlers) Ltd.
Glenbrook Foods Ltd.
St. Brendans Irish Cream Liquer Co. Ltd.
Munton (Antrim) Ltd.[1]
Desmond and Sons (Enniskillen) Ltd.
Finlay (Block Machinery) Ltd.
Quaterfoil Ltd.[1]
Phoenix Picture Frames Ltd.
InchProcessors Ltd.
Irlandus Prototypes Ltd.[1]
Cookstown Clothing Ltd.[1]
Springtown Engineering Ltd.[1]
Four M (NI) Ltd.[1]
Munton Textiles Ltd.
Power Automation Products Ltd.[1]
Concrete Systems Ltd.
Portaferry Pumps and Equipment Ltd.
TBF Thompson Ltd.
Parkgate Spinners Ltd.[1]
Taste Rite Foods Ltd.
Flying Horse Sports Ltd.[1]
Dunluce Knitwear Ltd.[1]
B. H. McCleery and Co. Ltd.
Altona Wood Craft Ltd.[1]
Cor Van Heughten Ltd.
McNeill Assemblers Ltd.[1]
Millbrook Engineering Ltd.[1]
SMS Locks Ltd.[1]
Sugna Ltd.
Co-Tem-Co. Ltd.
Viking Manufacturing Co. Ltd.[1]
Green Point Appliances Ltd.
Electronic Patentees Ltd.[1]
MHM International Ltd.
G. A. General Works (Ards Holdings)[1]
Textile Recycling Ltd.[1]
Foyle Meats Ltd.
Shergrim Ltd.
Fleming Poultry Ltd.
Castledawson Shirt Co. Ltd.
McQuillan Bros. Ltd.
Acquaculture Ltd.[1]
Textile Engineering Co. Ltd.[1]
Ulster Crystal Ltd.[1]
Regna International Ltd.[1]
Tyrone Scientific Ltd.[1]
B. and J. Jupiter Crusiers[1]
Enniskillen Meat Packers (Fermanagh Meats)
Featherlite Plastics Ltd.[1]
Moy Central Manufacturing Co. Ltd.
Masstock Systems Ltd.[1]
Denroy Plastics Ltd.
Cyntex Ltd[1]
John Mackle (T/A Collegeland Farms)
BIS Beecom (Int) Ltd
Armagh Designs Ltd[1]
Copeland Clothes Ltd
Ballyrashane Foods Ltd
Brookhaven Ltd
Textflow Services Ltd
Acheson and Glover Chemicals Ltd
Strangford Brick Ltd
Powerscreen Manufacturing Ltd
Sandstock Brick Ltd
W. J. Farrell Exports Ltd
Tobermore Paving Products Ltd
Linfield Group Ltd (Castlewellan Division)

Great Britain

ISA Poultry Services Ltd
McCourquodale plc
Airport Catering Services Ltd
Rumenco Ltd
Cooper Technical Components Ltd
Lynjoy Ltd
Winner Shoes Ltd[1]
Thermomax Ltd
C. P. Trim Ltd[1]
Software Ireland Ltd
Pharmaceutex (IV Fluids) Ltd[1]
Walmsleys Games Components[1]
Nocobond Ltd
Ulcon Ltd
Oakland Foods Ltd[1]
Pactgreen Ltd[1]
Fairfax Jersey Ltd[1]
Moss Lane Spinning Ltd[1]
Glenbank Finishing Ltd[1]
Maine Spinning Co Ltd[1]
Perry Heating (Supermatic Ltd)[1]
Abacus Engineering Ltd[1]
Groadawick (NI) Ltd.[1]
Swaddlers (Europe) Ltd.[1]
United Meat Packers (NI) Ltd.
McDonnell Douglas Information Systems Ltd.
Stern Fenster UPVC Ltd.
Group Publishing Co. Ltd.
Capita (NI) Ltd.
Liam Williams Knitwear Ltd.
Kalon Group plc
Tensator (NI) Ltd.

United States of America

Quad Signs (NI) Ltd.
Falconette Ltd.[1]
Heritage Crystal Ltd.[1]
O'Brien Machinery Ltd.[1]
Lear Fan Ltd.[1]
Oaks Development Ltd.[1]
Chesapeake Cutters Ltd.[1]
DPP Shreiber Cheese Co. Ltd.

AVX Ltd.
De Lorean Motor Co.[1]
Coronary Care Systems Ltd.[1]
Fisher Body Ltd.
Hyster (NI) Ltd.
National Supply Co. Ltd.[1]
LFE International BV
American Monitor International Ltd.[1]
Sam Fox (Synthetic Industries Ltd.)
Fastigium Ltd.
Neotech Industries Europe Ltd.

Canada
Universal Sections (Yardmaster)[1]

Denmark
Thrige-Scott Ltd.
Bulrush Peat Co. Ltd.
Tyrone Shoes (1975) Ltd.[1]
Scan Candles Ltd.[1]

Netherlands
Multi-Food Machinery Ltd.
NI Paper Mill Co. Ltd.
Tufted Carpet Tiles Ltd.
Van Oerle Alberton (NI) Ltd.

Switzerland
Smart (UK) Ltd.
Scandanavian Hosiery Ltd.[1]

Japan
IWAX (UK) Ltd.[1]
Canyon Europe Ltd.

Pakistan
Down Linen Yarns Ltd.

Hong Kong
Texlin Yarns Ltd.[1]

Sweden
Tilgman Keramik Ltd.[1]
Regal Foods Ltd.

Cyprus
Quality Dairies Ltd.[1]

West Germany
Elastic Berger Ltd.
Keese Label Presses[1]
Rusi Cosmetics Ltd.[1]
Andus Electronics Ltd.
Gerd Ney Ltd.[1]
Tools and Cans Ltd.

France
Montupet (UK) Ltd./Willace (UK) Ltd.
B S Toolings Ltd.

Republic of Korea
Daewoo Electronics (UK) Ltd.

Republic of Ireland
Mastercut Meat Packers Ltd.
Norish (NI) Ltd.
UAP Ltd.
Powercrusher Ltd.[1]
Associated Polymers Ltd.[1]
Container Refurbishing Ltd.[1]
MCL Plastics Ltd.[1]
Glen Electric Ltd.
De La Rue Smurfitt (NI) Ltd.
Camella Foods Ltd.
Mastercut Foods Ltd.
Henry Denny and Sons (NI) Ltd.
ETI Ltd.
Crosspharma Ltd.
Grassland Fertilisers Ltd.
Atlantic Leathers Ltd.

[1] Denotes closure.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list and identify the medium, large and small companies who received Government assistance and which have defaulted on their loans; and how much in each case has had to be written off as bad debts for the period for which data is available, identifying in each case whether the company was supported by LEDU, the Industrial Development Board or its predecessor the Department of Commerce.

Mr. Viggers: Information about individual companies which have defaulted on loans from Government agencies is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The cumulative value of Government loans written off as irrecoverable by the agencies concerned is as follows. The local enterprise development unit, Northern Ireland's small business agency, has written off £2·5 million since it was formed in 1971. A total of approximately £37·5 million owed to the former Northern Ireland development agency and its predecessor, the Northern Ireland Finance Corporation, was written off between 1972 and 1982, comprising both share capital and loan investments. Since 1966, loans issued by the former Department of Commerce totalling £16,482,572 have been written off, as has £207,660 relating to loans issued by its successor, the Industrial Development Board.

Harland and Wolff and Short Bros.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the average cost per job in Short Bros. and Harland and Wolff by year for the period for which data is available; and what will be the average cost per job to transfer these companies into the private sector over keeping them in the public domain.

Mr. Viggers: Government support for Harland and Wolff and Short Bros. takes various forms, some of which cannot be quantified in cost per job terms.

However, based on the external funding requirement (loans and Government grants) for both companies the average cost per job figures in each of the last five years has been:

	Harland and Wolff £	*Short Bros.* £
1983-84	7,286	3,000
1984-85	7,360	1,000
1985-86	7,494	4,100
1986-87	13,063	5,500
1987-88	14,342	16,300

Transferring both companies to the private sector will result in a decrease and not an increase in the level of future Government support to Harland and Wolff and Short Bros.

It is anticipated that there will be a cost to Government on a one-off basis in transferring each company to the private sector; thereafter each company will be regarded as eligible for Government support in line with other private sector companies in Northern Ireland.

Criminal Injuries (Compensation)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table giving the amounts in the fiscal years 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89 of payments made to *(a)* civilians under the Criminal Injuries Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, *(b)* members of the security forces (Royal Ulster Constabulary, Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve, British Army and Ulster Defence Regiment) under the Criminal Injuries Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, *(c)* compensation payments made under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and *(d)* compensation payments under the Criminal Damage (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 and subsequent legislation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: For the years 1985-88, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 4 November 1988 at column *826*. The corresponding figures for 1988-89 are as follows:

	1988-89 £
Compensation payments to civilians under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (NI) Order 1977	[1]11,632,823
Compensation payments to members of the security forces under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (NI) Order 1977	[2]3,298,305
Compensation payments under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978	1,258,294
Compensation payments under the Criminal Damage (Compensation) (NI) Order 1977 and earlier legislation[3]	20,606,264

[1] Includes £7,770 paid under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (NI) Order 1988.

[2] Includes £850 paid under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (NI) Order 1988.

[3] The current criminal damage legislation is the Criminal Damage (Compensation) (NI) Order 1977.

Notes:

1. It is regretted that due to a computational error an incorrect figure (£686,242) was previously shown—column *826*, 4 November 1988—under Compensation Payments under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 for 1987-88—the correct figure should read £578,699.

2. The amounts shown for 1988-89 may be subject to slight variation on completion of the appropriation account.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches were made on female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Maghaberry, in each month from October 1988 to February 1989; if he will give the number of persons involved and the number of times each person was searched; whether any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being conducted; and if he will indicate the reasons for the search, namely, making a remand appearance at court, attending trial, inter-prison visit or other reasons.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information requested is as follows:

	October 1988	*November 1988*	*December 1988*	*January 1989*	*February 1989*
Number of searches					
Total number of searches carried out	20	32	36	22	28
Total number of inmates searched	14	22	23	19	23
Number of prisoners searched once	8	14	14	16	19
Number of prisoners searched twice	6	7	7	3	3
Number of prisoners searched more than twice	—	1 (4 times)	2 (4 times)	—	1 (3 times)
Reasons for search					
First admission on remand/awaiting trial	4	10	6	11	9
First admission on sentence/final discharge	12	16	13	7	17
Attending remand court	1	—	—	—	—
Attending trial	—	—	—	—	—
Inter-prison visits	—	—	1	—	—
Pre-release home leave	2	6	16	4	—
Visits to outside hospital	1	—	—	—	1
Returning from bail application	—	—	—	—	1

No prohibited article was found during these searches. On one occasion a prisoner refused to co-operate in a full reception search or talk to any member of staff. A full search was then carried out by two officers; the prisoner did not assist or resist as it was taking place.

Post-Chernobyl Restrictions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of farms, number of sheep and number of acres subject to post-Chernobyl restrictions as at February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* The following is the information:

Number of farms—123
Number of sheep—21,000
Area of land—21,612 acres

SCOTLAND

National Health Service Land and Site Values

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of the land and site values referred to in paragraph 2.7 of the health White Paper.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand that the hon. Member is referring to paragraph 2.7 of Scottish working paper 5 "Capital Charging", rather than to the White Paper Cm. 555. As indicated in paragraph 4.1 of that working paper, health boards are expected to record their capital assets and to value them on a provisional basis during 1989-90 and to refine these values during 1990-91. There are no plans to publish details of individual landholdings and site values of health board properites.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Lawson: The ECOFIN Council met in Luxembourg on 17 April. I represented the United Kingdom.

The council reached agreement with a delegation of the European Parliament, under the conciliation procedure, on the regulations required to implement the new own resources decision of June 1989 which include measures to tighten controls against fraud.

The council had a further discussion of the Commission's proposals on taxation of savings, of direct tax measures to encourage cross-border co-operation between enterprises, and of the proposed 18th VAT directive.

The council discussed indirect tax approximation, stressing the need to consider alternative approaches for the abolition of fiscal frontiers.

The council heard a presentation from the Commission on the revised proposal for a second banking co-ordination directive.

The council adopted a common position on the proposed directive on own funds of credit institutions.

The President of the Commission outlined the main features of the report of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Union which is to be discussed further by the council. I made it clear that, while supporting practical steps within the framework of the existing treaty designed to improve economic and monetary co-operation, the United Kingdom cannot accept the transfer of sovereignty implied by the proposals for full economic and monetary union contained in the Delors report.

Internal Market

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total value at the latest available full year of public sector contracts in each of the European Community countries other than the United Kingdom of a character which will make them open to Community-wide bidding as part of the creation of the internal market.

Mr. Brooke: None. The cost would not be justified. Information is available from European Commission studies on the size of the procurement market in various industrial sectors in other member states but the value of the contracts to be opened to Community-wide bidding will depend on the coverage of the proposed directives and the threshold above which they will apply. The Commission is investigating the effect of setting the threshold at various levels.

EC (Payments)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) *Official Report*, 8 November 1988, column *112*, what was the net payment made to the European Community by the United Kingdom for each year since 1979; and what was in each case the net payment to European Economic Community institutions as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is set out in the table.

Total net payments to European Community institutions[1]

	£ million	*Percentage of money GDP*
1979-80	841	0·4
1980-81	168	0·1
1981-82	117	0·1
1982-83	589	0·2
1983-84	836	0·3
1984-85	974	0·3
1985-86	822	0·2
1986-87	1,079	0·3
1987-88	1,664	0·4
1988-89	950	0·2

[1] Excluding overseas aid: for domestic public expenditure planning purposes, part of the United Kingdom's contribution to the Community budget is attributed to the overseas aid programme.

Treasury Stock

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of persons holding 2½ per cent. Treasury stock 1975 issued in 1946-47; and what is the size of the average holding.

Mr. Lilley: There are approximately 12,300 registered holders of 2½ per cent. Treasury stock 1975 or after with an average size holding of £38,700. It is impossible without undue cost to distinguish between personal and corporate holdings.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost of redemption of 2½ per cent Treasury stock 1975.

Mr. Lilley: The cost of redemption of 2½ per cent Treasury stock 1975 or after would be £475 million.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to redeem 2½ per cent Treasury stock 1975.

Mr. Lilley: None.

Personal Imports

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to increase the duty free limit on personal imports of gifts into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The travellers' allowances for goods purchased duty free for importation as personal gifts are

provided for under European Community legislation. The Government has long supported the Commission's proposals to increase substantially the £32 allowance for goods other than tobacco, spirits, wines and so on, but it has not so far been possible to obtain the necessary agreement of all member states.

Reverse Auctioning

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the practice of reverse auctioning of Government debt began; and how it is regulated.

Mr. Lilley: The first reverse auction was held in January 1989, and was carried out by the Bank of England.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which financial institutions or sectors have participated in buying Government debt through reverse auctioning.

Mr. Lilley: Only the Bank of England buys Government debt through reverse auctions. Figures are not available for the institutions or sectors selling stock, because many of the offers will be channelled through gilt edged market makers.

Figures showing transactions in Government stock by various sectors in 1989 Q1 (the quarter in which the first reverse auction took place) will be published in the May *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much Government debt has been reverse auctioned over each of the last 30 years for which records are available.

Mr. Lilley: Only one reverse auction has been held so far and this took place in January 1989. This reverse auction was for £500 million nominal of stock.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of properties owned by Her Majesty's Treasury and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* (i) Nil; (ii) Nil.

Village Halls

Mr. Amos: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the consequences on village halls of the extension of value added tax on the construction of new buildings, fuel and power, water and sewerage supplies.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* Where village halls are engaged in business activities, VAT will be due on supplies to them of construction services and fuel and power. Water and sewerage services will, however, remain zero-rated. The imposition of tax on supplies of construction services and fuel and power is a consequence of the unwelcome European Court of Justice ruling published on 21 June last year. Business is defined widely in EC VAT law and could include the hiring out of village halls to local groups and other users.

Public Sector Debt

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state for each year from 1970-71 to 1987-88, and estimate for 1988-89 (i) the public sector net debt outstanding at current and 1988 prices, (ii) the net change from the previous year at current and 1988 prices and (iii) the components of the public sector net debt including assets such as foreign exchange reserves for each year both at current and 1988 prices.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The available information is as follows:

Net Public Sector Debt (End Year)

	Current prices		*1988-89 prices*	
	£ billion	*Change on previous year*	*£ billion*	*Change on previous year*
1974-75	59·5	—	234·0	—
1975-76	71·8	12·3	224·9	−9·0
1976-77	81·3	9·4	224·6	−0·3
1977-78	87·9	6·6	213·5	−11·1
1978-79	95·3	7·4	208·8	−4·7
1979-80	102·1	6·8	191·7	−17·1
1980-81	116·5	14·4	184·6	−7·2
1981-82	127·2	10·7	183·7	−0·9
1982-83	135·0	7·8	182·0	−1·6
1983-84	147·3	12·3	189·8	7·8
1984-85	160·7	13·4	197·4	7·6
1985-86	166·8	6·1	194·2	−3·2
1986-87	171·1	4·3	192·7	−1·5
1987-88	171·3	0·2	183·7	−9·0
1988-89 (forecast)	157·0	−14·3	157·0	−26·7

Components of net public sector debt (£ billion)

Current prices	*Net public sector debt*[1]	*Gross public sector debt*	*Total*	*Public Sector liquid assets of which*		*Other*
				Gold and foreign exchange	*Commercial Bills*	
1974-75	59·5	63·0	3·4	2·5	0·0	0·9
1975-76	71·8	75·8	4·1	3·1	0·1	0·9
1976-77	81·3	88·6	7·3	5·6	0·1	1·6
1977-78	87·9	100·2	12·3	10·9	0·0	1·4
1978-79	95·3	108·5	13·2	10·6	0·3	2·3
1979-80	102·1	117·3	15·2	12·5	0·8	2·0
1980-81	116·5	135·3	18·9	12·6	2·8	3·5
1981-82	127·2	147·2	20·0	10·6	7·0	2·3
1982-83	135·0	156·5	21·5	11·7	6·3	3·6
1983-84	147·3	172·2	24·9	11·6	9·8	3·4
1984-85	160·7	189·7	29·0	11·0	7·2	10·8
1985-86	166·8	197·9	31·1	12·7	8·7	9·7
1986-87	171·1	204·6	33·5	16·9	7·0	9·7
1987-88	171·3	213·4	42·1	25·2	8·3	8·6
1988-89 (forecast)	157·0	—	—	—	—	—
1988-89 prices						
1974-75	234·0	247·5	13·4	9·8	0·0	3·5
1975-76	224·9	237·3	12·8	9·7	0·3	2·8
1976-77	224·6	244·8	20·2	15·5	0·3	4·4
1977-78	213·5	243·5	29·9	26·5	0·0	3·4
1978-79	208·8	237·7	28·9	23·2	0·7	5·0
1979-80	191·7	220·3	28·6	23·4	1·5	3·7
1980-81	184·6	214·5	29·9	19·9	4·4	5·5
1981-82	183·7	212·5	28·8	15·4	10·2	3·3
1982-83	182·0	211·0	29·0	15·8	8·4	4·8
1983-84	189·8	221·9	32·1	15·0	12·7	4·4
1984-85	197·4	233·0	35·6	13·5	8·8	13·3
1985-86	194·2	230·4	36·2	14·8	10·1	11·3
1986-87	192·7	230·4	37·8	19·0	7·9	10·9
1987-88	183·7	228·9	45·2	27·0	8·9	9·2
1988-89 (forecast)	157·0	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Net public sector debt = Gross public sector debt minus public sector liquid assets.
No net public sector debt figures are published for the years prior to 1974-75.

DEFENCE

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Sainsbury: The numbers and percentages of women in senior posts are as follows:

Grade	*Number*	*Percentage*
1-4	2·0	1·8
5	13·0	3·7
6	10·0	1·2
7	111·5	3·6
Total 1-7	136·5	3·1

There are 41 (1 per cent.) staff at grades 1 to 7 who are from ethnic minorities all at grades 5 to 7.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Ministry of Defence has recently completed a survey in which all staff were asked to state their ethnic origin. Over 76 per cent. of staff responded. Information on ethnic origin is now sought as a matter of routine from all those who join the Department.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: Posts in senior grades in the Department are generally filled through promotion from within. Members of ethnic minorities who have the appropriate qualifications are considered for promotion to such posts on the same basis as other staff. As I said in my reply of 24 June 1988 at column 740-41, a programme of positive action is now in hand which includes special steps to recruit staff from ethnic minorities. It is hoped that these steps will in time lead to a greater number of such staff being considered for senior posts.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 23 March, *Official Report* column *756*, in which form central records hold information regarding low-flying sorties; and how the information requested in the questions can be obtained.

Mr. Neubert: For management purposes, central records of low-flying sorties are held as monthly and annual totals for the whole of the United Kingdom low flying system. The records neither show where the sorties originated or terminated nor which counties were overflown during the sortie. The information requested in the hon. Member's questions in the *Official Report*, column *756*, of 23 March is not therefore available.

Brigade of Gurkhas

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans for the Brigade of Gurkhas.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have made it clear that we intend that there shall be a continuing role for the Gurkhas in the British Army following the withdrawal from Hong Kong in 1997. We hope to be in a position to make a further statement soon.

United States Exercises

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the exercises involving United States forces personnel at RAF Nocton Hall in September 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: From 25 September to 4 October 1988 the United States Air Force wartime contingency hospital at RAF Nocton hall was activated for the reception of simulated United States casualties evacuated from Germany, via RAF Coningsby, as part of the aeromedical element of exercise Reforger 88.

Aircraft Shelters

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give the number of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation standard hardened aircraft shelters completed at RAF bases in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979 for which numbers are available in the following categories; (i) shelters paid for directly by his Department, (ii) shelters paid for out of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation infrastructure programme funds that are for use by RAF aircraft, (iii) shelters paid for out of United States Government funds and (iv) shelters paid for out of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation infrastructure programme funds that are for use by United States aircraft;

(2) if he will give the number of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation standard hardened aircraft shelters at each Royal Air Force base in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to publish this information.

Service Schools

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he makes for out of school in-service training for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary teachers in each country where service schools are situated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: The Service Children's education authority arranges a wide range of out of school in-service training for primary and secondary teachers on a regular basis, both in the United Kingdom and in countries where service children's schools are situated. These are provided by LEA advisers retained by SCEA, Her Majesty's inspectorate and independent consultants, according to the subject matter.

In addition SCEA organises support visits to service children's schools over and above the normal in-service training, throughout the academic year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the pupil teacher ratio, the total pupil roll, the total number of teachers employed and the annual pupil turnover for each service secondary school.

Mr. Neubert: I will write to the hon. Member.

WALES

Internal Market

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the total value to the latest available full year of public sector contracts in Wales of a character which will make them open to Community-wide bidding as part of the creation of the internal market.

Mr. Peter Walker: None. The assessment could be made only at disproportionate cost.

Forestry Commission Staff

Mr. Allan Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were *(a)* working for and *(b)* working in the different occupational categories for the Forestry Commission in Wales in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Peter Walker: The numbers of people working for the Forestry Commission in Wales in the different occupational categories are given in the following table:

	1979	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Direct employees						
Professional grades	185	165	165	161	160	148
Administrative grades	133	113	120	128	125	117
Industrial grades	1,177	723	689	646	599	522
Contractors[1]	717	587	648	673	679	713
Total	2,212	1,588	1,622	1,608	1563	1,500

[1]Contractors include people working for timber merchants in Forestry Commission woodland.

Home Improvement Grants (Rhondda)

Mr. Allan Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount given to Rhondda borough council for home improvement grants in each of the financial years from 1978-79 to the present at 1988 prices; and how many individual grants were given by Rhondda borough council in each year.

Mr. Grist: Provision for capital expenditure on home improvement grants forms part of an authority's overall housing capital allocation. It is for local authorities to decide how their resources are best used to meet the needs of their particular area. Rhondda's total housing allocations since 1978-79 at 1988-89 prices are given in the following table, along with the number of completed grants given by Rhondda district council in each of those years.

	Housing Capital Allocation (at 1988-89 Prices)[1] £000	Number of completed grant given
1978-79	12,961	343
1979-80	12,962	397
1980-81	9,793	417
1981-82	6,223	523
1982-83	7,478	940
1983-84	15,503	3,095
1984-85	9,171	2,999
1985-86	6,953	2,004
1986-87	10,383	1,993
1987-88	11,598	1,498
1988-89[2]	14,463	1,293

[1] Expressed at 1988-89 prices using GDP deflators. Allocations prior to 1981-82 are not comparable with 1981-82 and subsequent years as a new system of local authority finance was introduced in 1981-82.
[2] Housing capital allocations figure is provisional. Number of completed grants given is for April-December 1988.

Valleys Initiative

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what are the estimates of *(a)* deadweight and *(b)* displacement with respect to the valleys initiative estimate of 25,000 to 30,000 jobs; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many of the new jobs created in the valleys initiative area have been forthcoming from grants made since the initiative was launched;

(3) what proportion of the estimated 25,000 to 30,000 jobs to be created by the valleys initiative will be (i) full-time and (ii) part-time;

(4) what is the estimated full-time equivalent number of jobs to be created by the valleys initiative.

Mr. Peter Walker: I indicated in the document "The Valleys: A Programme for the People" that on past experience Government commitments of regional development grant and regional selective assistance on the scale anticipated for the three years of the valleys programme would be likely to create between 25,000 and 30,000 full-time equivalent jobs. This would involve a large number of projects spread over a wide area and it is not practicable to provide estimates of deadweight and displacement. However, it is not anticipated that the deadweight and displacement elements would be very great.

During the nine months to 31 March 1989 offers of RDG and RSA assistance have been made to 310 projects in the valleys involving the forecast creation of over 7,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

New jobs will also be created with the aid of grants and investment under other headings.

NHS Land and Site Valuations

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of the land and site valuations mentioned in paragraph 2.7 of the health White Paper.

Mr. Grist: Some 888 NHS properties in Wales were valued in 1987 by the office of the chief valuer of the Inland Revenue. The current use value of these properties was estimated at approximately £285 million and the open market value at £219 million.

Economic Policy (Speech)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had on the proposals on general economic policy contained in his speech on 10 April to the Tory Reform Group.

Mr. Peter Walker: None.

Untreated Milk

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many milk producers in *(a)* Pembrokeshire and *(b)* Wales produce untreated milk.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is as follows:

(a) 46
(b) 267

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females were in full-time employment in May 1979 in Wales; how many people are in full-time employment in Wales in the current year; how many part-time (i) males and (ii) females were employed in May 1979 and are in full-time employment in the current year; and how many apprentices there were in May 1979 and how many apprentices there are in the current year.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* The only figures available are those derived from quarterly returns to the Department of Employment and from the annual labour force survey of a sample of households in Great Britain, 5,000 of which are in Wales, carried out on behalf of the Department of Employment.

The hon. Gentleman will find estimates of the number of male and female employees in employment, the self-employed and the civilian work force in employment in June 1979 (the closest date to May 1979 for which information is available) in table 9 of the supplement to *Welsh Economic Trends*, Volume 11.

The breakdown of the estimated number of male and female self-employed in June 1979 is published on page 22 of the *Employment Gazette*, October 1987, historical supplement No. 2. The latest comparable figures for June 1988 of male and female employees in employment, self-employed, those engaged in work-related Government training schemes and in the civilian work force are published in the *Employment Gazette* April 1989 page 205.

No information for June 1979 and June 1988 is available on the breakdown between full-time and part-time male employees in employment, but table 9 of the supplement to *Welsh Economic Trends* volume 11 provides estimates of full and part-time female employees in employment for June 1979. Comparable figures for June 1988 may be obtained from table 1.5 of the *Employment Gazette*, February 1989—but revised figures are available from the Department of Employment and will be published in table 1.5 of the May 1989 *Employment Gazette*.

Information from the labour force surveys during the spring of 1979 and 1988 show the number of apprentices in Wales to be 17,000 and 16,000 respectively.

Copies of all the above publications are in the House of Commons Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Poverty

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* a copy of his letter to the director of social work of the National Children's Home concerning poverty.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The text of the letter is as follows:

"Thank you for sending me your Factfile on children. The document as a whole covers an enormous amount of ground, but I was particularly interested in the point highlighted in your front page on 'dividing the cake'.

In essence, your Factfile invites the unwary reader to freely associate 'poverty' with the pattern of household income distribution. Any suggestion that 'poverty' can be measured by the distribution of the cake without regard for the changing size of that cake must be questioned. Between 1975 and 1985—a period almost identical to the one you quote—average household real incomes and the incomes of the lowest fifth of households both grew by 14 per cent. Indeed, real household incomes grew throughout the distribution. Those who purport to claim that people are getting poorer—when in fact people are getting better off—cannot have got it right.

It is also more than a little fanciful to invite the reader to use the value of Child Benefit as an indication of 'poverty'. Some 70 per cent. of families who stand to gain from an increase in Child Benefit have incomes above average male earnings and what matters to them and most other working families is the real value of take-home pay. It is therefore worth noting that since 1978-79, at all multiples of full-time adult male earnings, real take-home pay has increased by well over a fifth.

I am releasing a copy of this letter to the press tomorrow."

Widows' Pensions

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) why Mrs. Marion Ing of 1 Chilton close, Acklam, Middlesbrough, receives £16·07 per week by way of a widow's pension; and if he will make a statement about Government policy relating to pensions for widows in this position;

(2) why a letter to him dated 3 March about Mrs. Marion Ing of 1 Chilton close, Middlesbrough, has not yet received a reply.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A letter has been sent to my hon. Friend today which explains how Mrs. Ing's widow's pension has been calculated.

Entitlement to widows' benefit for women widowed after 10 April 1988 is determined by the changes introduced at that time. These changes reflected the changing employment patterns amongst widows and have resulted in a scheme which is better targeted and overall more equitable.

Lone Parents

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) of 10 November, *Official Report*, column 294, what was the total number of lone parents and their dependants in November 1979 and November 1988 *(a)* dependent on receipt of income support or family income, and *(b)* the total number of lone parents and their dependants on the same dates, showing in each case, the percentage change since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest date for which all the information requested is available is 1986 and this is reflected in the table. The reference to family income has been understood to mean family income supplement.

	1979	*1986*	*Percentage increase*
Supplementary benefit (now Income Support)[1]			
Lone parents	318,000	602,000	89
Dependants	558,000	996,000	78
Family income supplement (now Family Credit)[2]			
Lone parents	42,000	91,000	117
Dependants	73,000	142,000	95
Total of lone parent families[3]			
Lone parents	840,000	1,010,000	20
Dependants	1,400,000	1,600,000	14

[1] Annual Statistical Enquiries—November 1979 and February 1986.

[2] 10 per cent. sample of Family Income Supplement load.

[3] Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys—"Population Trends 45" (Autumn 1986) and "Population Trends 55" (Spring 1989).

Eviction

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North on 17 April, what arrangements he proposes to recommend to *(a)* landlords and *(b)* claimants to avoid the possibility of eviction resulting from benefit changes introduced on 10 April.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government believe that landlords will adapt to the new situation by adjusting their charges for board and lodging accommodation so that they are in line with the rest of the market. Claimants will be able to select accommodation in this market, and will no longer have their options constrained by anomalous benefit provisions for people staying in board and lodging accommodation. We have no plans to provide information to claimants beyond that already available from the Department.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have applied for admission to the United Kingdom as refugees or otherwise seeking asylum, by national origin, in each of the two years subsequent to and prior to the coming into force of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act) 1987; how many and what percentage of applicants were granted admission to the United Kingdom during each such period; and what was their national origin.

Mr. Renton: The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act) 1987 came into force in March 1987. Information on applications for refugee status, and on grants and other decisions in the years 1985 to 1987, by nationality, is published in the 1986 and 1987 volumes of the annual Home Office statistical bulletin "Refugee Statistics, United Kingdom" (table 6 of bulletin issue 13/87 and tables 6 and 7 of bulletin issue 16/88), copies of which are in the Library. These figures include applications for refugee status made by persons after their admission to the United

Kingdom in another capacity, as well as those seeking admission as a refugee. Corresponding information for 1988 is not yet available but will be published in the 1988 volume of this bulletin in the summer of 1989.

These figures do not include South-East Asian refugees who are dealt with under separate arrangements and are granted settlement on their arrival in the United Kingdom. The number granted settlement in the years 1985 to 1988 is published in table 18 of "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1987" (Cm 415) and table 3 of Home Office statistical bulletin, issue 10/89 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1988", copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of time taken to reach a decision on an application for admission to the United Kingdom as a refugee or otherwise by way of asylum excluding time accounted for by appeals against his decisions in each of the two years prior to and subsequent to the coming into force of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987.

Mr. Renton: The available information is given in the following table. Information for 1988 is not yet available.

Estimated average length of time[1] taken to reach a decision on an application for refugee status in the United Kingdom, for cases decided during the year.
Average time in months

	Months
1985	12
1986	14
1987	14

[1] Excluding the time accounted for by an appeal where practicable, although this cannot be done in all cases.

Remand Prisoners

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he has not yet introduced into East Anglia the same time limits as he has applied in other regions on the length of time defendants may be held in custody while awaiting trial; when he expects to do so; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Custody time limits will be extended on 1 June this year to a further 22 English counties including Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Category A Prisoners (Searches)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the number of body searches, cell searches and cell changes and strip searches carried out on category A prisoners being held at Winchester police station during September and October 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No category A prisoners were held at Winchester police station during the period in question.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the number of body searches, cell searches and cell changes and strip searches carried out on each of the category A prisoners being held at Her Majesty's Prison, Durham, monthly since Septembr 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As the hon. Member knows, records are not kept of the occasions when rub down seaching or "frisking" is carried out in prisons and it is not the practice to disclose detailed information about security arrangements such as that requested about the frequency of cell searches and cell changes.

Comprehensive records of strip searches are available only in respect of category A women prisoners, of whom there were three in Durham prison between 1 September and 30 October, and four between 31 October and 31 March. The number of occasions on which each was strip searched in each month from September to March is shown in the following table.

	Prisoner A	*Prisoner B*	*Prisoner C*	*Prisoner D*
September	2	7	4	—
October	3	6	2	1
November	4	5	4	4
December	4	6	3	4
January	1	—	1	1
February	5	2	1	2
March	3	2	2	3

Passport Applications

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average waiting time for passport applications to be processed at each of the United Kingdom issuing offices.

Mr. Renton: The current processing times for straight-forward non-urgent postal applications at the six United Kingdom passport offices are shown in the table. Urgent applications are given priority, and are not normally subject to delay.

Average time between receipt of application and issue of passport (working days) 16 April 1989

Passport Office	*Working days*
London	20
Glasgow	37
Peterborough	27
Newport	33
Liverpool	46
Belfast	4

Poppewell Report

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the actions taken by Her Majesty's Government in respect of each of the recommendations of the Popplewell report.

Mr. John Patten: The action taken relating to the recommendations of the final report of the Popplewell inquiry has been as follows.

Designation under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 has been extended to all sports grounds used for either association football, rugby union, rugby league or cricket and identified as having accommodation for over 10,000 spectators (recommendation 2).

As from 1 January 1988 parts I and II of the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987 abolished the distinction in the 1975 Act between "sports grounds" and "sports stadia" (recommendation 1), introduced a power for local authorities and fire authorities to issue prohibition notes or restriction notices (recommendations 7 and 8), and required local authorities to arrange annual inspections of designated sports grounds (recommendation 9(ii)).

As from 1 January 1989 part III of the 1987 Act introduced a system of safety certification for stands able to accommodate at least 500 spectators under cover at undesignated sports grounds and for their periodical inspection by local authorities (recommendations 3 and 4).

As from 1 June 1988 part IV of the 1987 Act extended entertainment licensing to indoor sports entertainments to which the public are invited as spectators (recommendations 5 and 6).

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which came into force on 1 January 1986 had already extended the police powers of search and arrest in ways which help them to deal with troublemakers at football grounds (recommendations 11 and 13). The Public Order Act 1986 created a new offence of disorderly conduct to cover hooliganism in football grounds as elsewhere (recommendation 12).

Following a review (recommendation 14) a relaxation of the controls over the sale and possession of alcohol in executive boxes was introduced in the Public Order Act 1986.

The Government's existing proposals for a membership scheme are contained in the Football Spectators Bill *[Lords]*. This follows previous efforts to encourage the football authorities to introduce membership schemes on a voluntary basis (recommendation 15).

The question of structural fire precautions and means of escape in buildings (including covered sports stands) (recommendation 10) is under review as part of the Government's comprehensive overhaul of the building regulations. It is the intention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to issue a consultative paper by the end of this year seeking comment on a package of proposals dealing with these issues.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government in pursuit of recommendations 34 and 35 of the report from the working group on the green guide on football grounds, published as an adjunct to the Popplewell report.

Mr. John Patten: The guide to safety at sports grounds was revised in 1986. It provides guidance on the function of pitch perimeter fences including the importance of providing gates or access points to allow full access to the playing area (or perimeter track) where it is likely to be used as a place of safety in an emergency.

Hillsborough (Public Order)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has received showing the number of people who were *(a)* arrested and *(b)* charged inside or outside the Sheffield Wednesday football ground on Saturday 15 April for *(a)* drink-related offences, *(b)* obstruction or assault on police officers, *(c)* robbery, *(d)* looting, *(e)* pilfering and *(f)* urinating in a public place.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief constable of South Yorkshire police has informed us that 43 persons were arrested of whom 10 were charged, 10 ejected from the ground and 23 were cautioned and released. Of the 43 arrests 19 were for drink-related offences, one for obstructing or assaulting the police, none for robbery, looting or pilfering, and one for urinating in a public place.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has received about how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* emergency service personnel on duty at Hillsborough on Saturday, 15 April required medical treatment because of injuries sustained during their duties on that day.

Mr. John Patten: I am informed by the chief constable that 19 police officers have so far been recorded as having received medical treatment for physical injuries. The chief fire officer informs me that so far none of his staff have reported a need for such treatment and I am informed by the chief ambulance officer that he is still engaged in debriefing his staff and that this information is not yet available. A number of members of the different services are suffering from stress and other problems relating to their experiences at Hillsborough.

Broadcasting White Paper

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisations have responded to his White Paper "Broadcasting in the '90s: Competition, Choice and Quality" November 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: I have today placed in the Library a list of the main organisations which have submitted comments on the broadcasting White Paper. We have received over 3,000 responses altogether. Further details may be obtained from the Home Office broadcasting department, room 669, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT.

HEALTH

Operations (Contracting Out)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations within the Trent regional health authority were contracted out to private hospitals, and at what cost, for the year in which he has the latest figures; what was the position five and 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 4 April at columns *88-89*. The 816 deaths and discharges quoted break down into 21 surgical, 353 convalescent, 441 terminal care and 1 unspecified.

Mental Illness

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the most recently available figures for admission rate *(a)* for mental illness generally and *(b)* schizophrenia to mental hospitals, broken down by country of birth.

Mr. Freeman: The figures in the table show the proportion of all such admissions for all mental illness and for schizophrenia only, broken down by place of birth. The information relates to admissions, and not to individual patients, since the same patient may be admitted more than once during the year.

All admissions to National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units, England during 1986, by place of birth
Percentage of all admissions

Place of birth	*All mental illness per cent.*	*Schizophrenia only per cent.*
England	51·1	54·0
Ireland[1]	2·4	2·2
Scotland	1·6	1·2
Wales	0·6	0·4
Europe	1·2	1·8
Africa	0·7	1·4
Central South Asia[2]	1·0	1·8
Rest of Asia	0·4	0·7
Australasia	0·1	0·1
Americas	0·3	0·4
Caribbean	0·7	2·5
Not known	39·9	33·5

[1] Including Northern Ireland.
[2] Central South Asia comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment of the research and development of a monitoring alarm into the prevention of sudden infant death syndrome by Clifton Towers Products Ltd. has been carried out by his Department; and whether Her Majesty's Government will financially support further research and development of this invention.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the work done by Clifton Towers Products Ltd. at Port Talbot into cot deaths; what requests have been made to his Department for the funding of research and development; and what parallel or similar research and development is being carried out with the support of his Department.

Mr. Freeman: Clifton Tower Products Ltd. contacted this Department in April 1988 to say that it had developed a monitor which would help save many babies' lives by triggering an alarm when the baby's temperature rose or fell by 2° from the normal. In subsequent correspondence they said that the alarm would prevent a significant proportion of sudden infant deaths. The evidence for this claim was requested. In September, material on the association between sudden infant death syndrome and temperature was submitted together with a request for unspecified financial support for the development of the alarm. (A subsequent letter requested £120,000 for further research.)

I understand that prior to, and during, this correspondence Clifton Towers was also in discussion with the Welsh Office. The results of these discussions were that, while no assistance was provided for research and development work, assistance was given by the Welsh Office for market research and associated activities under the business improvement services scheme (BIS), and the establishment of a manufacturing facility has been aided under the regional development scheme (RDG).

Officials have taken expert medical advice. The conclusion is that while, as we already knew, there is an association between some sudden infant deaths and temperature, the nature of the relationship is unknown. We are discussing further with the Medical Research Council what is known about the relationship between temperature and infant mortality and morbidity. On the basis of the conclusions of those discussions we will be able to consider the merits of a scientific evaluation of the usefulness and effectiveness of temperature monitors/alarms.

Hospital Trusts

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Calderdale health authority and others on setting up National Health Service hospital trusts.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have not received any representations from Calderdale health authority. Duncan Nichol, the chief executive of the National Health Service, has asked for initial expressions of interest in the proposals to be sent to my Department through regional health authorities, by 31 May.

Elderly People (Provision)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his Department's guidelines for *(a)* the provision of geriatric beds, *(b)* homes for the elderly and *(c)* home help staff per head of population.

Mr. Mellor: The level of service provision is a matter for the local health authority or local social services authority respectively to decide. Authorities should take into account local needs and where appropriate, the potential contribution of voluntary, private and informal care.

The Department's planning guidelines to health authorities (circular HC (88) 43) state that they should provide an integrated range of services for elderly people, comprising community health services, acute geriatrics/geriatric assessment, rehabilitation and continuing care.

Hearing Therapy Service

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what stage has been reached in the review being undertaken by the National Health Service Training Agency into the hearing therapy service; when he expects the report to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Provision of hearing therapy and employment of hearing therapists in the National Health Service are the responsibility of health authorities. The National Health Service training authority is concerned with the training required for health authorities to achieve the supply of skills they require. In this connection the authority has been reviewing future training provision for hearing therapists and the development of standards-based vocational qualifications. Proposals have been made

to the care sector consortium and the Training Agency, and the British Society of Hearing Therapists has been invited to comment.

Capitation Fees

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the possibility of the new standard capitation fees for general practitioners, proposed in "General Practice in the National Health Service—A New Contract", leading to general practitioners screening out patients before taking them on in their practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Our intention to increase standard capitation fees is an important part of our proposals for a new contract for GPs. By increasing capitation payments as a proportion of a GP's income we will encourage GPs to recognise the importance of providing full services that will attract patients to their lists and keep them with the practice. In the case of patients aged 75 and over, we will be paying a much higher capitation fee than before. These measures will introduce a degree of competition in general practice which has not existed before and will, we believe, reduce rather than increase the likelihood that GPs will refuse to accept patients onto their lists. If any patient has difficulty in being accepted onto a GP's list the family practitioner committee has and will continue to have the power to assign the patient to a particular GP.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what assumptions on future numbers of *(a)* surgery sessions, *(b)* doctors' clinics and *(c)* general practitioners, his proposals for the introduction of capitation arrangements in "General Practice in the National Health Service—A New Contract" are based.

Mr. Mellor: The examples at appendix F of "General Practice in the National Health Service: A New Contract" are intended to illustrate in broad terms the effect of the proposed new contract on the remuneration of the average GP with a list size of a specified level. The notes on each example explain the assumptions made about the number of minor surgery sessions and health promotion clinics which the average GP with the list size specified in each case might undertake. No assumption has been made about the number of GPs as this does not affect the figures.

General Practice (Targets)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the attainability of the assumptions of 80 per cent. screening of eligible women and 90 per cent. of childhood immunisation set out in "General Practice in the National Health Service—A New Contract" and what account was paid to patient resistance in setting these targets;

(2) what estimate he has made of the potential disincentive effect on general practitioners undertaking screening and childhood immunisation of the levels at which the target take-up rates have been set.

Mr. Mellor: GPs will be required under their terms of service to provide health promotion and illness prevention services. These services will include advising patients on the wisdom of attending for screening and of immunising children. It is Departmental policy to achieve 80 per cent. coverage of women aged 20-65 for cervical cancer screening, and 90 per cent. coverage for immunisation of children under five. These target coverage levels provide a sufficient margin to allow for cases where screening or immunisation would not be appropriate.

We believe that these levels are attainable. In 1987-88 in England childhood immunisation coverage levels were 87 per cent. for polio (with diphtheria and tetanus), 76 per cent. for measles and 71 per cent. for whooping cough with uptake rates for the last two accelerating. Recent initiatives such as the introduction of the MMR vaccine will lead to further improvements. By replacing item of service payments for these services with payments related to achievement of the target coverage levels we will reward the good GPs who already reach those levels and introduce a powerful incentive for those who do not.

GP Contracts

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the transitional arrangements to the introduction of the new general practitioner contracts.

Mr. Mellor: No decisions have been made on this matter. Officials are in consultation with the General Medical Services Committee on what transitional arrangements if any will be needed when the new GPs' contract is introduced.

NHS Reform

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how antenatal care will be costed under the new financial arrangements for general practitioners and National Health Service services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether patients readmitted to hospital will be accounted as new patients in every individual instance for the purposes of financial monitoring under the White Paper "Working for Patients."

Mr. Mellor: The detailed implementation of our proposals for funding hospital services through contracts between health authorities, or general practitioners, and hospitals is currently being considered and discussed with those most closely involved. We plan to issue guidance and model forms of contract by April 1990 as made clear in the second of the working papers published on 20 February.

"Working for Patients"

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish *(a)* a list of those commenting and *(b)* a summary of the comments of the relevant professional bodies, on the Government's National Health Service White Paper "Working for Patients."

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 17 April at column *53*.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expressions of public support he has received for his proposals on the National Health Service White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mr. Mellor: We have received many expressions of public support, both at local and national levels, for our proposals for an NHS able to provide more choice and better care for all patients.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the ethnic data for youth training scheme trainees as at March and October 1988 separately for each youth training scheme, both local and large company unit, operating in the Birmingham and Solihull, and Coventry and Warwickshire areas.

Mr. Cope: Because of the exceptional length of the reply, I am sending the hon. Member the information requested, a copy of which has also been placed in the Library.

Training and Work Experience

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) of 7 November, *Official Report*, column *51*, if he will tabulate the total number of people on each Government training and work experience scheme in (i) 1979 and (ii) the latest date for which figures are available, giving the total of all such persons in each case and the overall cost.

Mr. Cope: The table shows the number of people in Great Britain who started a training or work experience scheme in the years 1979-80 and 1987-88 and the total cost to the Training Agency (formerly Training Commission, formerly Manpower Services Commission). The figures include those who started for a second or subsequent time. Average numbers of trainees in training as quoted in my reply of 7 November are not available for every scheme.

Scheme	*1979-80*		*1987-88*	
	Number (000s)	*£ million*	*Number (000s)*	*£ million*
Youth Opportunities Programme	216	123	—	—
Training Opportunites Programme	91	229	—	—
Special Temporary Employment Programme	22	51	—	—
Community Industry	9	17	9	26
Youth Training Scheme	—	—	398	1,066
Old Job Training Scheme	—	—	49	157
New Job Training Scheme	—	—	99	67
Training For Enterprise	—	—	108	23
Access to Information Technology	—	—	22	1
Local Grants to Employers	—	—	124	[1]31
Self Standing Work Preparation	—	—	46	—
Training Linked to Community Programme	—	—	41	31
Community Programme	—	—	269	1,110
Voluntary Projects Programme	—	—	106	15
Total	338	420	1,271	2,527

[1] Does not include local consultancy grants.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to change the system of reporting and recording of industrial injuries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 came into force on 1 April 1986. They changed and augmented the previous reporting requirements, in particular by extending definition of major injuries and introducing an obligation to report injuries resulting from accidents at work which cause incapacity for more than three days. Although there are no immediate plans for any further change to the reporting and recording system, the operation of the new regulations is being kept under close scrutiny.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he now anticipates that unemployment levels will fall to 1979 levels.

Mr. Lee: The Department does not forecast future levels of unemployment.

Wages (Underpayment)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he will take to reduce the underpayment of wages by employers which are attributed to ignorance or inadvertence.

Mr. Nicholls: Measures designed to inform employers about statutory obligations on minimum pay include the provision of information in employer and business guides, talks and advice given by the wages inspectorate to individuals and groups, and the maintenance of a register of employers in scope of wages councils and to whom wages orders need to be sent. Given the very high level of compliance with wages orders these measures are considered adequate. However, particular efforts have recently been made to ensure that the inspectorate's register is kept up-to-date and there has been increased contact between the inspectorate and organisations which advise the public.

Sherrards Training Centre

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in view of Manpower Services Commission funding what discussions his Department had with the Spastics Society regarding Sherrards training centre, Welwyn Garden City, prior to its closure; and what reasons were given for the closure of this centre.

Mr. Lee: The Training Agency, formerly the Manpower Services Commission, has had a number of detailed discussions over the last 18 months with the Spastics Society covering both funding and the need to improve and modernise the assessment and employer rehabilitation services at Sherrards training centre.

Detailed funding proposals were put to the society in November 1988 offering a continued level of support up to 31 March 1990.

Subsequently in a letter to the Training Agency the society stated that a review of the society's services had been carried out to ensure that the organisation was using its resources in the most effective and efficient means for the benefit of its clients. As a result of the review, the society has decided to close the Sherrards training centre.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he is prepared to meet part of the funding of residential costs for training disabled people at Sherrards training centre.

Mr. Lee: The Sherrards training centre closed on 31 March.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will discuss with the relevant local authorities the possibility of joint funding for Sherrards training centre.

Mr. Lee: No. The Training Agency paid up to 90 per cent. of the running costs of the Sherrards centre. The society, however, made it clear that even with a high level of funding it wished to close the centre.

The centre closed on 31 March 1989.

Jobcentres

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he intends to publish his responses to his Department's management report concerning evaluation of the integration pilot schemes between jobcentres and unemployment benefit offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler *[holding answer 20 March 1989]:* Work to test a number of different approaches to integrate employment service local offices and the services they provide began in March 1989. I am currently considering the results of this exercise.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the ethnic monitoring details of YTS trainees for each individual large company unit scheme in the United Kingdom as at October 1989 or the most recent date.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Because of the length of the reply, I am sending the hon. Member the available information, copies of which have also been placed in the Library.

EC Employment Council

129. **Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the Spanish Employment Minister, president of the Employment Council of Ministers, at Seville.

Mr. Fowler *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* I attended the informal meeting of Labour and Social Affairs Ministers in Seville on 7 March 1989. We had wide-ranging discussions on the social dimension of the single European market.

ENVIRONMENT

Rating Reform

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reimburse in full to Lambeth council the estimated cost of £3 million for preparations for the collection of poll tax to be incurred in the financial year 1989-90.

Mr. Gummer: No. The Government's grants and capital allocations towards the cost of preparing for the community charge will not necessarily reimburse in full the cost of implementation in each particular authority in view of the freedom available to charging authorities and community charges registration officers to decide what resources to deploy to implement part I of the Local Government Finance Act 1989 in their areas.

The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the decision not to allow the sale of the extract of the community charge register was taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am sending the hon. Member an extract from a speech giving the reasons by my noble Friend the Earl of Caithness in another place on 29 June 1988, during the passage of the Local Government Finance Bill, *Official Report*, columns 1689-90.

Mr. Aspinwall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the responses to the 1989 consultation document on the transition of non-domestic rating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Department is evaluating the results of the consultation. Responses to our proposals are still being received. We shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that following the introduction of the community charge, private landlords reduce the rents charged to tenants in respect of that element of their rents presently charged on account of the rates.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department intends to publish a factsheet on community charge and rents inclusive of rates. This factsheet will be made widely available to landlords and tenants from a variety of sources.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider legislation on other steps to encourage local authorities to request poll tax registration officers to help to improve the level of electoral registration throughout Britain as they contact members of the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax.

Section 29 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 empowers electoral registration officers to inspect community charges registers. This provision will ensure that the activities of community charges registration officers are of assistance to electoral registration officers in compiling electoral registers.

Quality of Life

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* details of those policies introduced by him since 1983 with the intention of improving the quality of life for the rural community.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Rural communities are benefiting along with urban communities from a wide range of policies introduced by the Department.

The farming and rural enterprise package launched in 1987 set out the Government's aims of protecting and enhancing the countryside while also enabling the development of a viable rural economy. These aims are achieved to a large extent through the activities of statutory bodies sponsored by the Department: the Countryside Commission, Nature Conservancy Council and Rural Development Commission.

In the planning field, the Department has given new guidance to encourage diversification of the rural economy, including advice on development involving agricultural land and the need for better standards of layout and landscaping for new housing in rural areas. The General Development Order that came into effect on 5 December 1988 extended specific planning control to proposed new livestock units and related structures such as slurry tanks within 400m of residential and other property.

A number of initiatives have also been taken to help increase the supply of low cost housing in rural areas for all sections of the community. These include:

—enabling the Housing Corporation to establish a special rural programme with a target of 1,100 units a year by 1991-92;

—increased funding for the National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust's work in providing start-up support for rural housing associations in smaller villages;

—changes to the planning rules to enable local authorities exceptionally to release small pockets of land, not previously designated for housing, for low cost schemes to meet the needs of local people;

—changes to the rules governing publicly-funded shared ownership which give housing associations a pre-emption right to repurchase the property at market price once the shared owner has moved on.

Certification Officers (Educational Establishments)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made on the designation of certification officers in educational establishments in England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: Regulations 4(1) of the Personal Community Charge (Students) Regulations 1989 (SI No. 443) provides that the certification officer as regards an educational establishment shall be the individual having responsibility for registering the enrolment of students to courses of education provided by that establishment. There is no provision and no need for certification officers to be designated.

Housing (Rural Areas)

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to ensure that local planning authorities encourage an adequate supply of low-cost housing in rural areas.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend's reply of 3 February to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) explained the circumstances in which planning authorities may exceptionally wish to release sites not allocated for development in order to secure the provision of low cost housing in rural areas. That statement made clear that the case for releasing additional land for this purpose will be essentially a matter for local judgment. We have also announced a four-fold expansion in the Housing Corporation's funding programme for rural housing association schemes; and tax changes announced in the Budget have removed uncertainties about the position of landowners who wish to make land available for such schemes. Taken together, these changes will, I believe, provide a real stimulus to the supply of low cost housing in rural areas.

Rate Precepts

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a league table of the 10 counties in England with the highest rate precepts from 1989-90.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is available on page 9 of the report on rates and expenditure of local authorities in England 1989-90, which was placed in the Library of the House earlier this month.

Dogs (Registration)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received in the current year on the matter of dog registration schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the current year a number of letters have been received from hon. Members and others. The RSPCA also arranged for postcards to be sent to us.

Greater Manchester Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Minister for Local Government will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Stretford dated 19 January concerning his response to inquiries concerning the Greater Manchester residuary body.

Mr. Gummer: I will write to the hon. Member.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which accommodation occupied by the Crown Suppliers will be available for sale, distinguishing between freehold and leasehold when invitations to purchase the Crown Suppliers are issued; what is the latest assessment of their market value; and which accommodation he intends to insist must be bought as a condition of sale;

(2) what furniture and furnishing designs owned by the Crown Suppliers will be available for sale when invitations

to purchase the Crown Suppliers are issued; and what the total sales of goods manufactured to these designs amounted to in each of the last two years.

Mr. Chope: The detailed contents of the invitation to purchase are being considered.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Wellington house, the headquarters of the Crown Suppliers, is suffering from sick building syndrome.

Mr. Chope: Wellington house is one of a number of buildings which have been the subject of a study by the occupational chest unit of Wythenshawe hospital, Manchester, into the incidence of sickness among staff working in office buildings of different types. The final report and conclusions are awaited.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when listed-building consent was given to the development of Battersea power station; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Listed building consent for the main scheme was given by Wandsworth borough council in June 1986. Listed building consents for minor works have been given subsequently.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Plants and Seeds

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what conclusions the Government have reached about the recommendations in the report on the plant variety testing and seed certification systems in the United Kingdom issued in April 1988.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friends and I have examined the recommendations in the light of the views expressed by individuals and organisations. We have decided that work on implementing the majority of the recommendations should now proceed and that a few should be deferred.I am placing a document in the Library of the House giving details of what the Government have decided on each recommendation.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, and overall in his Ministry are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Ryder: The information on women follows. Ethnic minority figures are based on replies from staff who have completed an ethnic origin questionnaire.

By Grade and Grade Equivalent	*Number of Women*	*Women as percentage of total staff*
1	—	—
2	—	—
3	1	4
4	—	—
5	9	8
6	8	8
7	104	11
All staff	4,445	43

By grade and grade equivalent	*Total staff*	*Total respondents*	*Ethnic minority respondents*	*Ethnic minority respondents as percentage of total respondents*
1	1	1	—	—
2	5	5	—	—
3	24	20	—	—
4	16	14	—	—
5	111	96	1	1·04
6	103	88	1	1·13
7	942	776	7	0·90
All staff	10,331	7,786	295	3·78

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Ministry last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: My Department carried out ethnic origin surveys of all permanent staff-in-post during 1983-87 and all new entrants to my Department are asked to complete ethnic origin questionnaires when they apply for vacancies. We are also doing a follow-up survey of staff who have not provided information on their ethnic origin. For the latest available figures from the surveys I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him today in reply to another question.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Ministry.

Mr. Ryder: Recruitment of executive officers, equivalent grades, and above in my Department is normally done by the Civil Service Commission. My Department has assisted in the past with the Commission's campaigns to attract black and Asian applicants at the higher levels, and will continue to do so.

Pig Herds

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average size of pig herd and the total number of herds for the years *(a)* 1960, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1985, *(e)* 1986, *(f)* 1987 and *(g)* 1988.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested is given in the table. The data covers England and Wales and is taken from the annual agricultural census.

	Number of holdings with pigs	*Number of pigs*	*Average number per holding*
1960	110,664	4,336,669	39
1970	59,853	6,408,391	107
1980	22,973	6,607,619	288
1985	17,961	6,792,121	378
1986	17,446	6,868,512	394
1987	16,865	6,871,733	407
1988	15,960	6,857,451	430

Note:
The comparison between the 1970 and 1980 figures has been slightly affected by changes in the size threshold which excluded very small holdings from the annual census from 1980 onwards.

Dairy Herds

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average size of dairy herd and the total number of herds for the years *(a)* 1960, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1985, *(e)* 1986, *(f)* 1987 and *(g)* 1988.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested is given in the table. The data cover England and Wales and are taken from the annual agricultural census.

	Number of holdings with dairy cows	*Number of dairy cows*	*Average number per holding*
1960	140,109	2,594,809	19
1970	84,891	2,714,463	32
1980	49,118	2,672,019	54
1985	42,351	2,580,098	61
1986	41,055	2,573,222	63
1987	39,188	2,486,404	63
1988	37,524	2,378,862	63

Note:
The comparison between the 1970 and 1980 figures has been slightly affected by changes in the size threshold which excluded very small holdings from the annual census from 1980 onwards.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the total land area designated as environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Ryder: The total area of land designated as environmentally sensitive areas in the United Kingdom is approximately 790,000 hectares of which 333,000 hectares are in England.

Horses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to introduce the Farm Animal Welfare Council's recommended code of practice for horse markets and sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 12 January at column *724*.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 April 1989

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lebanon

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he proposes to take to seek to restrain the military action by Syrian forces against the Lebanon.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Twelve have made démarches to both the Syrian and General Aoun and issued a statement on 17 April calling for restraint and a ceasefire. We fully support the efforts of the Arab League to find a negotiated solution and urge all parties to work with the league to that end.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during his visit to the United States of America on 16 April, he raised with the United States Secretary of State *(a)* the first preparatory committee meeting of the 1990 nuclear non-proliferation treaty to be held 1-5 May in New York, and *(b)* the strategy that the depository states for the non-proliferation treaty could adopt to increase the membership of the treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. However, we take every appropriate opportunity to discuss these issues with the United States. Preparations for the 1990 non-proliferation treaty review conference are frequently discussed at official level.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, at the recent meeting in Spain of the Council of European Community Foreign Affairs Ministers, he raised the matter of the 1990 fourth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the non-membership of France of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Vietnam

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the visit of the Minister of State to Vietnam with regard to the returning boat people.

Mr. Waldegrave: During his visit my noble Friend Lord Glenarthur discussed all aspects of the boat people problem, stressing the heavy burden placed on Hong Kong and the urgent need to find a comprehensive and durable solution. He visited some returnees in their homes. All said they were glad to have returned, and that they had been well treated.

Israel

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Israel following the killing by their occupation forces of Palestinian children in Nahalim.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Israelis will be fully aware of our views on this tragic incident following the statement by the FCO spokesman on 14 April and our vote in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution on 20 April.

British Citizens Overseas (Imprisonment)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give by reference to a common date the number of British citizens imprisoned abroad, showing the number in each country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: To the best of our knowledge there were 1,190 British citizens detained overseas on 31 December 1988. A breakdown by country is given in the table.

British nationals detained overseas: 31 December 1988 (Total 1,190)

	Number
Argentina	1
Australia	16
Austria	5
Bahrain	1
Bangladesh	3
Barbados	2
Belgium	32
Botswana	1
Brazil	4
Bulgaria	1
Canada	7
Colombia	1
Cote D'Ivoire	1
Cyprus	2
Denmark	8
Ecuador	1
Egypt	4
Finland	3
France	162
Germany, West	116
Ghana	2
Greece	33
Guyana	1
Hong Kong	8
India	23
Indonesia	4
Iran	1
Iraq	1
Ireland	7
Israel	6
Italy	23
Jamaica	13
Japan	9
Kenya	9
Korea, South	1
Kuwait	8
Liechtenstein	2
Luxembourg	3
Malawi	1
Malaysia	3
Malta	7
Mexico	4
Morocco	8
Mozambique	1
Nepal	6
Netherlands	19
New Caledonia	1
New Zealand	3

	Number
Norway	26
Oman	4
Pakistan	1
Peru	5
Philippines	10
Portugal	27
Qatar	1
Saudi Arabia	5
South Africa	42
Spain	216
Sri Lanka	1
Swaziland	2
Sweden	32
Switzerland	42
Taiwan	3
Thailand	17
Trinidad and Tobago	1
Turkey	1
Turks and Caicos Islands	1
United Arab Emirates	9
United States of America	141
Venezuela	1
Yugoslavia	2
Zimbabwe	20
Total	1,188

Central America

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on *(a)* the percentage of voters which elected the present Governments of Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, *(b)* the protection of opposition parties and supporters from military or para-military attacks or repression in these countries and *(c)* the facilities to meet and campaign enjoyed by such parties; and what regard he has to these factors when formulating his policy towards Central America.

Mr. Waldegrave: The figures available to us are as follows:

(a)

Country	Election Date	Winning Candidate/ Party	Per cent. of votes cast
El Salvador	6 May 1984	José Napoleon Duarte (Christian Democrat)	[1]54·05
Guatemala	5 December 1985	Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo (Christian Democrat)	[1]68·00
Honduras	14 November 1985	Jose Azcona Hoyo (Liberal)	49·23
Nicaragua	4 November 1984	Daniel Ortega Saavedra (Sandinista National Liberation Front)	61·77

[1] Second Round Figures.

In the most recent Presidential election in El Salvador (19 March 1989), Alfredo Cristiani of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) won on the first round with 54·8 per cent. of the votes cast. He will take office on 1 June.

(b) There were reports of harassment of the opposition in the course of all these elections. The nature of this harassment varied according to the situation in each country. In El Salvador in 1984 a number of Left-wing parties decided that it would not be safe for them to participate. They did however participate in 1989.

(c) Opposition parties have in general enjoyed reasonable freedom to meet and campaign, although according to the Socialist International, in the Nicaraguan elections in 1984 the opposition suffered harassment and censorship of their campaign materials. They were also allotted unequal time on radio and television. Several political parties did not participate because they considered conditions did not exist for a genuinely democratic election.

Support for democracy is one of the guiding principles on which our policy towards Central America is based. We therefore take very careful account of the conduct of elections and the context in which they take place.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Deployment

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature and purpose of the deployment of United States Air Force reserve C-130 aircraft to RAF Benson in September 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The temporary deployment of three United States air national guard tactical aircraft units to RAF Benson in September 1988 was designed to give reservist aircrews experience of European flying conditions.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature and purpose of the deployment of United States marine corps F/A-18 aircraft to Edinburgh airport in September 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The purpose of the deployment of United States marine corps F/A 18 aircraft to Edinburgh airport during the period 3 to 9 September 1988 was to test the staging facilities for elements of the II United States marine air wing en route to a deployment destination in northern Europe as part of a NATO exercise.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all exercises or deployments involving four or more aircraft of visiting forces for 1988 at bases and facilities, both military and civil, in the United Kingdom, giving the number of aircraft, type of aircraft, the major base or facility used and the dates of the exercises.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be compiled without disproportionate cost and effort.

Imber

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the dangers to members of the armed forces training in the village of Imber and surrounding lands from (i) unexploded ordnance, (ii) metal fragments, (iii) wire entanglements and (iv) open trenches.

Mr. Neubert: Unexploded ordnance, wire entanglements, metal fragments, and open trenches are inherently dangerous. However, since soldiers are trained to recognise and take appropriate steps to deal with such dangers and have support from specialist explosive ordnance disposal teams, I am satisfied that risks to military personnel training in and around Imber village are kept to an acceptable minimum. Indeed there have been no recorded injuries to soldiers training in the area from unexploded ordnance in the last 10 years.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of injuries that have occurred to members of the armed forces training in the village of Imber and surrounding lands for each year since 1979 that are attributable to (i) unexploded ordnance, (ii) metal fragments, (iii) wire entanglements and (iv) open trenches.

Mr. Neubert: There are no records of injuries to members of the armed forces resulting from incidents involving unexploded ordnance whilst training in the village of Imber or the surrounding area in the years since 1979. In respect of the other data requested by the hon. Member, I regret that the information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 3 March, *Official Report*, column 358, if he will list the legislation subsequent to the Defence Act 1842 that is relevant to the powers under which his Department holds the village of Imber and surrounding lands.

Mr. Neubert: The legislation subsequent to the Defence Act 1842 that is relevant to the power under which MOD holds the village of Imber and the surrounding lands is the Ordnance Board Transfer Act 1855 and the Defence Transfer of Functions Act 1964.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 3 March, *(Official Report* column 357-58, if he will reconsider his decision not to search relevant records so as to ascertain the number of representations his Department has received regarding the continued use of the village of Imber and surrounding lands by the armed forces.

Mr. Neubert: No, but I stress that those records that are readily available indicate that no recent representations have been received concerning the continued use of Imber by the Army.

Ships (Visits)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on (i) the recent visit of HMS Turbulent to Liverpool, (ii) the recent visit of HMS Tireless to Cardiff, and (iii) the recent visit of HMS Churchill to Southampton.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These visits were carried out for rest and recreation purposes and to further relations between the Royal Navy and the areas concerned.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all visits by (i) United Kingdom and (ii) non-United Kingdom nuclear powered vessels to non-naval ports that have taken place since June 1987, giving the name of vessel, port visited and dates visited.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines have visited berths in United Kingdom civil ports on the following occasions since June 1987:

Royal Navy ships	*Period of visit*	*Ports visited*
HMS Trafalgar	28 September—3 October 1987	Liverpool
HMS Churchill	30 January—4 February 1988	Cardiff
HMS Superb	1 March—6 March 1988	Cardiff
HMS Courageous	2 March—7 March 1988	Liverpool
HMS Tireless	9 March—15 March 1988	Southampton
HMS Torbay	11 May—17 May 1988	Liverpool
HMS Sceptre	4 June—10 June 1988	Liverpool
HMS Trafalgar	12 October—18 October 1988	Cardiff
HMS Turbulent	2 December—12 December 1988	Liverpool
HMS Tireless	25 January—2 February 1989	Cardiff
HMS Churchill	23 February—28 February 1989	Southampton

There were no visits to civil ports by foreign nuclear-powered warships.

Exercise Womble

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence *(a)* how many soldiers were involved in Exercise Womble on Salisbury plain on 31 March, *(b)* which parts of Salisbury plain were covered by this exercise, *(c)* how many square miles, or square kilometres, were cleared by this exercise, *(d)* how many instances of (i) unexploded ordnance, (ii) metal fragments, (iii) wire entanglements or (iv) open trenches were found during this exercise, *(e)* how many injuries to personnel were recorded during this exercise, *(f)* how much litter was picked up during this exercise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: Exercise Womble formed part of the annual clean-up of all ranges, training areas and camps within the Army's south-west district area. It involved about 500 men, lasted one day, and covered some 35 square miles of the Salisbury Plain training area. Small amounts of unexploded ordnance were discovered and removed for safe disposal; these were one artillery shell, one demolition charge and three pyrotechnic devices. Eight 4-ton truck loads of metal fragments, iron pickets and the remains of metal targets were removed and 11 open trenches filled in. No serious injuries were reported although a number of soldiers were treated for minor cuts and abrasions. Some 700 plastic dustbin liners filled with a mixture of domestic civilian and military rubbish were recovered along with several discarded refrigerators and other domestic appliances.

Arms Deployment

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the levels he envisages for limits on the amounts of arms a country can station in another country under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation proposals to the conventional forces in Europe talks;

(2) if he will make a statement on the levels he envisages for zonal sublimits on the stationing of certain categories of weapons in specific geographical areas under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation proposals to the conventional forces in Europe talks.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to rules 3 and 4 in the proposals submitted by the 16 NATO countries at the opening of the conference on conventional forces in Europe, a copy of which is in the Library.

Harrier (Sales)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed sale of RAF Harrier GR3 aircraft to Zimbabwe.

Mr. Sainsbury: The content of discussions on defence sales matters is confidential.

Cruise Missiles (Boscombe Down)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps were taken to notify parties to the intermediate nuclear forces agreement of the transfer of eight cruise missile launchers from RAF Greenham Common to Boscombe Down airfield between 20 March and 5 April; why they were transferred; how their transfer affects the right to access for on-site inspection under the intermediate nuclear forces agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The INF treaty, which is a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union, allows either party to deploy treaty-limited items such as missile launchers within designated deployment areas for unspecified periods of time without the need to notify the other party. This arrangement has, I understand, worked well and given neither party any cause for concern.

As the hon. Member is aware, it is not our practice to comment upon operational details. I can, however, say that the launch vehicles were not transferred directly from RAF Greenham Common to A&AEE Boscombe Down, but spent time there during an off-base deployment which left Greenham Common on 14 March and returned there on 12 April. As this took place within the United Kingdom deployment area, there was no requirement for the United States to inform the Soviet Union, and no such steps were taken.

On-site inspections can only take place at specified locations, which in the United Kingdom are RAF Greenham Common and RAF Molesworth. Whenever an inspection is called, which is always at short notice, it is possible that treaty-limited items will be deployed away from those locations. This is accepted by both parties.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) of 7 March, *Official Report*, column 738, what category of nuclear disarmament it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to support.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In common with our NATO allies, this Government support arms control agreements, whether nuclear or conventional, which enhance stability and allow Western security to be maintained at lower levels of weapons. For the foreseeable future, the Alliance sees no alternative to its policy of deterrence based on an appropriate mix of adequate and effective nuclear and conventional forces, kept up-to-date where necessary.

Forest Fires

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if, pursuant to his answer of 11 April, he will consider providing the British armed forces with aircraft suitable for fighting forest fires.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. Responsibility for fighting forest fires rests with the appropriate civil authorities.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many instances have been detected in his Department of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether perpetrated by authorised or unauthorised users of the computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded;

(2) if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to his Department's computer files.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he can quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The risk of damage by hackers to MOD computerised files holding classified material is regularly assessed. It is not in the interests of national security to provide details of the current assessment.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether staff are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; and whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Staff are trained in computer security including hacking and computer viruses. In addition, departmental instructions are circulated on computer security-related issues.

The necessary contingency plans are in place to deal with computer downtime, no matter what the cause.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of his Department's policy on review of the security of its computer files.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: MOD computer security staff continuously review the Department's computer security policy and its application to ensure that constant and adequate levels of protection are provided for those computer systems processing or holding classified material.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department has taken to protect data in transit by electronic means.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Data in transit by electronic means is adequately protected. It is not in the interests of national security to provide details of the measures employed.

USAF Aircraft (Crashes)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about the crash of a United

States Air Force A-10 Tankbuster jet from RAF Bentwaters at Bank farm, Benwick near Chatteris, Cambridgeshire;

(2) if he will make a statement about each crash in the United Kingdom or its territorial waters of United States Air Force jets in the last year; what risk to life was involved; and what armaments they were carrying.

Mr. Neubert: During the last year, three United States Air Force aircraft have been lost in accidents in the United Kingdom, as follows:

i. 22 December 1988: and A-10 aircraft crashed near St. Ives, Cambridgeshire, during a routine training flight. The pilot successfully ejected.

ii. 4 April 1989: an A-10 aircraft crashed on landing at RAF Alconbury. The pilot was uninjured.

iii. 17 April 1989: and A-10 aircraft crashed during a routine training flight on open farmland one mile south of Benwick, Cambridgeshire. The pilot was killed.

In each case the aircraft was equipped with GAU7 anti-tank guns and practice ammunition. No civilians were injured as a result of any of these accidents.

RAF Aircraft (Crashes)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* all crashes involving RAF Jaguar aircraft since 30 April 1975, showing the date of the crash, the serial number of the aircraft, the unit it was attached to and the fatalities, if any, involved in the crash.

Mr. Neubert: The details of serious accidents involving RAF Jaguar aircraft in which the aircraft sustained irreparable damage are as follows:

Date	*Tail*	*Type/Mark*	*Station*	*Fatalities*	*Unit*
30 April 1975	XX831	Jaguar T2	Lossiemouth	0	226 OCU
5 February 1976	XX137	Jaguar T2	Lossiemouth	0	226 OCU
2 July 1976	XX822	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	1	14 SQN
15 September 1976	XX735	Jaguar GR1	Coltishall	1	6 SQN
17 September 1976	XX120	Jaguar GR1	Coltishall	1	54 SQN
14 December 1976	XZ102	Jaguar GR1	Laarbruch	0	2 SQN
25 February 1977	XZ120	Jaguar GR1	Laarbruch	1	2 SQN
14 June 1977	XX978	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	1	31 SQN
29 July 1977	XX148	Jaguar T2	Lossiemouth	2	226 OCU
21 March 1978	XX971	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	31 SQN
27 April 1978	XX149	Jaguar T2	Lossiemouth	2	226 OCU
25 July 1978	XX823	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	1	17 SQN
1 November 1978	XX759	Jaguar GR1	Lossiemouth	1	226 OCU
26 March 1979	XX147	Jaguar T2	Bruggen	0	17 SQN
22 June 1979	XX142	Jaguar T2	Lossiemouth	2	226 OCU
18 July 1979	XX960	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	14 SQN
23 November 1979	XX762	Jaguar GR1	Lossiemouth	1	226 OCU
10 December 1979	XX755	Jaguar GR1	Lossiemouth	1	226 OCU
10 December 1979	XX749	Jaguar GR1	Lossiemouth	0	226 OCU
28 May 1980	XX964	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	17 SQN
28 May 1980	XX961	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	1	17 SQN
17 July 1980	XX817	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	17 SQN
12 February 1981	XX827	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	1	17 SQN
14 April 1981	XX973	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	31 SQN
1 June 1981	XX828	Jaguar T2	Lossiemouth	0	226 OCU
17 July 1981	XX113	Jaguar GR1	Abingdon	0	MU
6 August 1981	XX972	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	1	31 SQN
21 October 1981	XX957	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	20 SQN
18 November 1981	XX758	Jaguar GR1	Lossiemouth	1	226 OCU
2 April 1982	XX122	Jaguar GR1	Coltishall	1	54 SQN
25 May 1982	XX963	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	14 SQN
11 June 1982	XX829	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	31 SQN
13 September 1982	XX760	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	14 SQN
29 September 1982	XX768	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	17 SQN
7 March 1983	XZ376	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	17 SQN
19 April 1983	XX742	Jaguar GR1	Coltishall	0	6 SQN
16 June 1983	XZ105	Jaguar GR1	Laarbruch	0	2 SQN
16 June 1983	XZ110	Jaguar GR1	Laarbruch	0	2 SQN
22 June 1983	XX721	Jaguar GR1	Coltishall	0	54 SQN
19 September 1983	XX114	Jaguar GR1	Lossiemouth	0	226 OCU
7 February 1984	XX750	Jaguar GR1	Coltishall	1	6 SQN
12 July 1984	XZ393	Jaguar GR1A	Coltishall	0	54 SQN
22 August 1984	XZ395	Jaguar GR1A	Coltishall	0	54 SQN
1 April 1985	XZ388	Jaguar GR1	Bruggen	0	14 SQN
9 July 1985	XX365	Jaguar GR1A	Laarbruch	0	2 SQN
7 October 1985	XX728	Jaguar GR1A	Coltishall	0	6 SQN
7 October 1985	XX731	Jaguar GR1	Coltishall	1	6 SQN

Date	Tail	Type/Mark	Station	Fatalities	Unit
27 November 1986	XX732	Jaguar GR1A	Lossiemouth	1	226 OCU
17 June 1987	XZ116	Jaguar GR1A	Coltishall	1	41 SQN
24 June 1987	XZ386	Jaguar GR1A	Lossiemouth	1	226 OCU
7 September 1988	XX834	Jaguar T2	Coltishall	1	6 SQN
13 April 1989	XZ359	Jaguar GR1A	Coltishall	1	54 SQN

Low-flying Aircraft

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will prohibit RAF low-flying over cliff nesting sites for sea birds on the east coast of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: For flight safety reasons, areas of major bird concentration, including the locations of major seabird breeding colonies in Scotland, are already notified to aircrews who will take account of the potential hazards in the planning and execution of their low flying sorties. It is not therefore generally necessary to impose mandatory restrictions on the overflight of specific cliff nesting sites.

NATINADS Exercise

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what role will be played by RAF Stornoway and Stornoway airport in the United Kingdom NATINADS exercise scheduled for 25 to 27 April;

(2) what role will be played by RAF Benbecula and Benbecula airfield in the United Kingdom NATINADS exercise scheduled for 25 to 27 April.

Mr. Neubert: During the NATO integrated air defence system exercise MAULSTICK, which is planned to be held between 25 and 27 April, the radar facilities at RAF Benbecula will be tested by a small number of aircraft operating some miles away from the island. RAF Stornoway will not be involved.

Defence Export Services

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Mr. Alan Thomas will be taking over from Sir Colin Chandler as head of Defence Export Services; and what are the terms of the appointment.

Mr. Sainsbury: Mr. Alan Thomas will start taking over from Sir Colin Chandler as Head of Defence Export Services in early July. He will assume total responsibility for the post in September.

Mr. Thomas was appointed at a salary of £100,000 a year subject to annual review. He will also be eligible for a performance bonus.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Manaus Conference

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the results of the Manaus conference, sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society, on Amazonia, at which he was represented.

Mr. Chris Patten: At the Manaus conference a five volume economic survey compiled by Dr. Ratter of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh was handed over. Forty-six scientific papers were read (in Portuguese) and useful discussions on future work were held. The Brazilian authorities expressed satisfaction with the level of expertise and the degree of United Kingdom/Brazilian co-operation. A series of reports will be prepared for *Acta Amazonia*, the major Brazilian journal of the National Institute of Amazon Research in Manaus. The Overseas Development Administration expects shortly a written report from the Royal Geographical Society.

Brazil

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for a member of his Department to visit the Maraca project, Brazil.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council gave him on 18 April, at column *183*. We are in discussion with the Brazilian authorities on what further assistance may be given for rain forest work in Brazil. If a visit by an Overseas Development Administration team is agreed it will present an opportunity for the team leader to visit the Maraca project.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the Minister for Overseas Development, has to pay a visit to Brazil.

Mr. Chris Patten: Dependent on other commitments, I hope to visit Brazil later this year.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for the forest regeneration team to return for two months to Maraca ecological reserve, Brazil.

Mr. Chris Patten: The forest regeneration team are returning to Maraca for two months under the project work plan funded by the Overseas Development Administration as soon as their visas have been authorised.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds Her Majesty's Government are providing to study the Alexa tree at the western end of Maraca, Brazil, for its potential in providing the plant alkaloid castanospermine; and what interim results are available from the clinical tests at St. Mary's hospital, London, with a view to providing a treatment for certain forms of the disease AIDS.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Overseas Development Administration support for research in the Maraca forests has been concerned with their management and

regeneration and not specifically with the Alexa tree. However we are aware of the great potential importance of the Alexa species for biochemical extractives. If the Brazilian authorities request support for collaborative research on the Alexa tree this will be considered sympathetically and could be looked at during the proposed ODA team visit to Brazil.

I understand laboratory studies involving synthetic castanospermine are in progress but I have no knowledge of clinical trials at St. Mary's hospital, London. The hon. Member may wish to approach the medical authorities about this.

Central America

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the level of British bilateral aid to each of the states in Central America for each year from 1979 onwards in *(a)* current and *(b)* constant prices.

Mr. Chris Patten: The figures for Central America and Mexico are as follows. The figures include investment by the Commonwealth Development Corporation but do not take account of joint funding provided to non-governmental organisations.

Gross bilateral aid to central America 1979—1987 in current prices

£ thousands

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Costa Rica	623	606	570	486	1,838	1,666	12,685	10,038	2,584
El Salvador	448	265	41	13	0	205	103	239	411
Guatemala	14	35	15	4	0	0	0	10	1
Honduras	230	335	5,002	2,272	6,670	3,446	3,653	1,258	811
Mexico	1,186	1,577	1,464	34,334	2,827	517	773	803	630
Nicaragua	246	127	91	49	64	9	116	86	0
Panama	63	94	102	62	43	49	67	70	72
Total	2,810	3,039	7,285	37,220	11,442	5,892	17,397	12,504	4,509

Gross bilateral aid to central America 1979—1987 in constant 1987 prices

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Costa Rica	1,127	916	773	613	2,204	1,909	13,751	10,513	2,584
El Salvador	811	401	56	16	0	235	112	250	411
Guatemala	25	53	20	5	0	0	0	10	1
Honduras	416	506	6,786	2,864	7,998	3,949	3,960	1,318	811
Mexico	2,146	2,384	1,986	43,277	3,390	592	838	841	630
Nicaragua	445	192	123	62	77	10	126	90	0
Panama	114	142	138	78	52	56	73	73	72
Total	5,085	4,595	9,884	46,915	13,720	6,752	18,858	13,096	4,509

Nicaragua

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing in ranked order the per capita contributions made by Economic Co-operation and Development member states to Nicaragua for the latest year for which figures are available, including the total aid given by each Economic Co-operation and Development country for that year.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows:

Net official development assistance from OECD member countries to Nicaragua in 1987

Donor	*Net official development assistance $US 000's*	*Per capita US $*
Norway	14,350	3·430
Sweden	25,590	3·047
Denmark	11,370	2·216
Finland	7,390	1·498
Netherlands	19,800	1·350
Switzerland	3,210	0·486
Austria	1,410	0·186
Italy	10,300	0·180
France	9,210	0·166
Germany	6,240	0·102
Belgium	770	0·078
Canada	1,060	0·041
Ireland	10	0·003
Japan	290	0·002
Australia	30	0·002
New Zealand	—	—
United Kingdom	—	—
United States	—	—
Total	111,030	0·157

Note: Figures relate to member states of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. No figures are available for non-DAC OECD members.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total emergency assistance given to Nicaragua in response to Hurricane Joan.

Mr. Chris Patten: Including our contribution through the European Community, the total emergency assistance given to Nicaragua by the United Kingdom in response to Hurricane Joan was £413,000.

Aid Policy

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what special allocations within grants for overseas aid will be made to ensure that women figure more highly in development projects, especially primary health care and education.

Mr. Chris Patten: Our grant aid finances activities which benefit both women and men. We do not make special allocations for either but we aim to design projects to meet women's special needs and problems wherever an opportunity arises.

Improvements in primary health care and education are central to promoting conditions which allow women to play their full part in development. Our recent booklet "Women, Development and the British Aid Programme", copies of which are in the Library, explains how we are helping in these fields.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Chemicals and Fertilisers

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the possibilities of declaring an amnesty for those farm chemicals and fertilisers currently the subject of banning orders.

Mr. Ryder: No representations have been made for an amnesty in respect of fertilisers since none of these are banned. There have however been a number of representations that an amnesty should be declared so as to permit the disposal of holdings of unapproved pesticide concentrates. In each instance it has been explained that no such amnesty is warranted, since those who can demonstrate that they have taken responsible steps towards achieving disposal—that is, by at least having made arrangements with a reputable specialist waste disposal contractor—need not fear that they will be penalised for illegal stockholding. Whenever the degree of risk permits, withdrawal of approval is phased so as to allow existing stocks to be used up.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Caerphilly of 11 April, *Official Report*, column *440*, whether he intends his Department to finance the additional research necessary on the tuberculosis vaccine for badgers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I intend my Department to contribute towards funding the further research referred to in my earlier reply.

Potatoes

Ms. Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East on 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *399-400*, whether he intends to update regularly the statistics relating to the use of tecnazene on potatoes.

Mr. Ryder: Yes. Pesticide usage surveys are undertaken at regular intervals and the results are published.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East on 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *399-400*, whether he now has further details of the use of tecnazene on the 1988 potato crop throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ryder: Details of the use of pesticides, including tecnazene, on the 1988 potato crop are still being collected. These figures will cover pesticide usage in England and Wales. Results available from the 1986 crop in Scotland were given in my answer to the hon. Member on 2 February at columns *399-400*. Pesticide usage statistics are not collected for Northern Ireland.

Cereals

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North, *Official Report*, 13 April, column 689, what was the total tonnage and average price per tonne of all cereals imported into the United Kingdom in 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Ryder: The following is the information:

	[1]*Quantity (tonnes)*	[2]*Average price (£/tonne)*
1986	3,517,365	142·05
1987	3,520,873	133·28
1988	3,370,401	134·05

[1] Quantities rounded to the nearest whole tonne.
[2] Average prices have been calculated from import values on a cost, insurance, freight basis.
Source: UK Overseas Trade Statistics.

ADAS

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people have been employed in the farm and countryside service of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The number of people employed in the farm and countryside service of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service in the years requested is as follows:

	Number
1987	1,903
1988	1,774
1989	1,785

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of man years spent by his advisers working in Agricultural Development Advisory Service for each of the last three years on the following: *(a)* free advice, *(b)* extensification work and *(c)* chargeable advice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: This information is in principle included in "Ministerial Information in MAFF" available in the Library of the House. However, publications to date have not distinguished between inputs to free and chargeable advice. It is anticipated such a distinction will be made in the 1989 version and the provisional figures for 1988-89 are 125 man years for free advice and 1,148 man years for chargeable advice. These figures exclude the activities of members of the State Veterinary Service who are not normally classified as "advisers".

An extensification scheme has not yet been introduced in the United Kingdom. Some ADAS manpower has been involved in advising policy makers on the preparation of a scheme, but it is not included in the figures and cannot be identified separately.

Milk

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has of the use of penicillinase in milk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We have no evidence of such use, which would be an offence under section 2 of the Food Act 1984.

Mr Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his intentions with regard to the sale of green-top milk.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on 23 February at columns *712-13*.

Fishing Vessels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on *(a)* the number of boardings of fishing vessels carried out by each European Community member state, *(b)* the proportion of such boardings which were of vessels registered in that country and *(c)* the number and outcome of prosecutions following such boardings over the latest period for which figures are available.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I regret that information on boardings of fishing vessels carried out by other member states and the number and outcome of prosecutions following such boardings is not available to me.

Food Labelling

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when Her Majesty's Government initially pledged themselves to introduce new laws to improve food labelling; when that proposed legislation is expected to be introduced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: We have for a number of years been following a policy of moving away from strict compositional standards for food (recipe law) which restrict consumer choice towards an improved system of food labelling, to ensure that consumers are given adequate information of food labels and are able to make an informed choice. European Community policy is also following the same course.

As part of the Community's food law harmonisation programme, amendments to the Community food labelling directive, are expected to be adopted by the Council very shortly, following which these will need to be implemented into United Kingdom law.

The main changes for the United Kingdom are on datemarking of foods. Proposals on nutrition labelling are also under discussion in Brussels. These aim to standardise the presentation of nutrition information so that it is easier for consumers to compare products and to achieve a balanced diet. Other proposals for improved food labelling are also expected to be tabled in the run up to 1992.

Reprocessed Meat

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will examine the use of mechanically reprocessed meat in pies and sausages and request that all products using such material shall be clearly labelled.

Mr. Ryder: Mechanically recovered meat is used in a number of meat products including pies and sausages. The Food Labelling Regulations 1984 require that a treatment given to a food or food ingredient should be indicated in the appropriate place on the label if the omission of such an indication would mislead the purchaser.

Sea Bass

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made with the French to limit their fishing of sea bass in the Channel.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I announced on July 27 last year at column *298-99* a series of new steps for the conservation of bass fisheries, involving an increased minimum landing size, mesh size restrictions and plans for the establishment of a series of nursery areas to give protection to juvenile bass. The measures do not involve proposals for quantitative restrictions on the adult bass fishery in the Channel. There is no evidence at present to support the need for such restrictions though we shall continue, however, to keep that fishery under review.

Rural Housing

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has had any discussions with interested parties on the provision of low-cost housing in rural areas.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales are, of course, responsible for policy on this matter in England and Wales, respectively. However, rural housing is an issue which is often raised with me in the context of agriculture and countryside matters. I therefore welcome warmly the statement made by the Secretary of State for the Environment on 3 February 1989 at columns 433-34 about new guidance to planning authorities in England, which is intended to increase the provision of low cost housing in rural areas.

I hope that following the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on the tax position of land sold to housing associations for this purpose, landowners will be encouraged to make suitable land available. An adequate supply of affordable housing to meet the needs of those who live and work in the countryside is an important element in the Government's policies for the diversification of the rural economy.

Tropical Timber

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, *Official Report*, 10 April, column *362*, he will make a statement on his policy in relation to ensuring where possible that tropical timber is obtained from sustainable sources, in relation to sea defences and other such projects.

Mr. Ryder: The source from which timber is obtained cannot be the sole criterion in judging the merits of sea defence and similar projects. Nevertheless, where possible my Department would welcome proposals which utilise timber from sustainable sources.

Potato Marketing Board

Mr. Hind: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his plans for the future of the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Ryder: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 19 April at column *175*.

Fishing (Aid)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the amount of Economic European Community financial support made available to the fishing industry of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, and Spain for each of the last available five years and the division of such support between catching, processing and port and market facilities.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information held centrally is as follows. I shall write to the hon. Member about the other information as soon as possible.

EC Aid Scheme

Mecus

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
	Belgium					*Denmark*					*France*				
Fishing Vessels and Aquaculture Grants	3·95	4·27	0·80	0·41	0·10	4·62	7·82	7·26	1·25	3·29	12·83	12·42	16·98	12·47	4·74
Market Support Measures	0·44	0·46	0·48	0·27	0·08	1·52	—	2·54	1·45	1·55	3·21	4·58	6·76	5·06	18·22
Marketing and Processing Grants	0·72	0·83	0·12	0·53	0·97	0·74	2·81	2·97	0·94	1·49	0·82	0·34	4·27	2·34	1·78
	Germany					*Netherlands*					*Spain*				
Fishing Vessels and Aquaculture Grants	3·20	2·90	7·71	4·41	1·39	2·07	1·33	4·73	0·66	0·57	—	—	22·06	32·2	18·14
Market Support Measures	1·40	0·44	0·17	0·27	0·49	2·47	1·11	0·90	—	0·06	—	—	—	2·40	19·38
Marketing and Processing Grants	0·57	1·83	0·95	1·83	1·34	—	0·85	1·20	0·41	0·81	—	—	—	4·34	6·63

Source:
(Mainly) EAGGF Financial Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give his estimate of the extent of national aid for fishing in the latest available year in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland and Spain in each of the following areas *(a)* construction support, *(b)* lay-up subsidy, *(c)* social security support when not working, *(d)* fuel subsidy, *(e)* support for processing industry, *(f)* financial support for fishermen's organisations and *(g)* provision of port or market facilities.

Mr. Donald Thompson: This information is not centrally available. But some indication of the national aids given by these member states is contained in the 1986 OECD publication "Review of Fisheries".

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms have taken the option of the set-aside scheme for agricultural land; what proportion of total agricultural land this represents; and if he will give similar figures for the other countries in the European Economic Community.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* The information so far available is as follows:

	Number of farms	*Hectares set aside*	*Percentage of arable land[1] in member state*
Belgium	39	383	0·1
France	210	2,409	Less than 0·1
Germany	25,289	170,635	2·4
Ireland	97	1,918	0·2
Netherlands	98	1,222	0·1
Spain	180	6,202	Less than 0·1
United Kingdom	1,820	57,613	1·2

[1]May in member states other than the United Kingdom include some land not eligible for the scheme.

HEALTH

Medical Ethics

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on medical ethics in practice and protection for patients against unscrupulous operators.

Mr. Mellor: It is for the medical profession itself, and in particular the General Medical Council, to lay down ethical guidance for doctors taking into account changing attitudes in society, and to ensure that it is followed. Such guidance applies equally to private practice as to practice in the NHS.

Listeriosis

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his intention to make listeriosis a notifiable disease.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is currently reviewing the list of notifiable diseases and, as part of this review, will consider whether listeriosis should be made notifiable.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the need to make listeriosis a notifiable disease.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Student Midwives

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many student midwives who started before April 1988 are on grades D, E and F; and how many who started after April 1988 are on grades D, E and F.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this information centrally.

Denture Replacements

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has recently had with regional health authorities to ensure that denture replacements are made available to patients in hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Health authorities will be well aware that if in-patients lose or break their dentures, arrangements should be made for the hospital dental service to supply a replacement as soon as possible.

Toxocariasis

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases have been reported each year since 1979 of persons suffering from toxocariasis.

Mr. Freeman: The information available on human toxocara infection is limited. The communicable disease surveillance centre receives around one hundred reports of laboratory identifications each year; however, the true incidence of infection is unknown.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many instances have been detected in his Department of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* Trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether perpetrated by authorised or unauthorised users of computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded.

Mr. Freeman: There have been no instances detected and no unsuccessful attempts recorded.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in view of evidence from the United States of America and France, that personal health records are being maliciously damaged by the implantation of computer viruses, what precautions are being taken against similar breaches of United Kingdom public health and medical records held on computer files.

Mr. Freeman: It is not the policy of the Department of publicise the measures taken to ensure the security of medical data since such information would be of assistance to potential attackers.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to his Department's computer files.

Mr. Freeman: There have been no recorded cases of unauthorised access.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of his Department's policy on review of the security of its computer files.

Mr. Freeman: The Department regularly reviews its computer security arrangements, but it would not be appropriate to publish details of procedures and arrangements.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he can quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in his Department.

Mr. Freeman: Computer systems containing sensitive information are subject to physical and local security measures designed to remove or minimise the risk of damage, including that by hacking, to that information. The Department does not consider it sensible to publish details of risks and counter-measures involved.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether staff are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration; and what plans exist to deal with penetration of particularly sensitive systems.

Mr. Freeman: Staff are briefed on a wide range of security risks and counter measures including those by hacking and viruses. Security contingency plans include provision for potential computer downtime caused by unauthorised access. These arrangements vary according to the level of sensitivity of the information held. The Department considers that the effectiveness of these arrangements would be reduced if details were made public.

Data Protection

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has taken to protect data in transit by electronic means.

Mr. Freeman: Electronic transmission of data is subject to physical and logical security measures appropriate to the level of sensitivity of the data transmitted. The Department does not consider it sensible to publish details of the security measures taken.

AIDS

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what scientific evidence was considered by the Committee on Safety of Medicines before it gave its approval for a licence to the drug AZT for the treatment of AIDS.

Mr. Mellor: The Committee on Safety of Medicines considered a range of scientific matters relating to the safety, quality and efficacy of this drug. The information supplied by a pharmaceutical company to support a licensing application is commercially confidential.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence there is on the reversibility of the side effects of the drug AZT and on the effect on the AIDS virus if the drug is discontinued;

(2) what are the known side effects on AIDS patients of the drug AZT.

Mr. Mellor: Zidovudine (AZT) has been associated with a range of side effects as set out in the ABPI Data Sheet Compendium 1988-89 (pages 1634-6). A copy is in the Library. Many patients do develop side effects due to the potency of this drug and the seriousness of their illness. Doctors are advised to monitor patients very carefully and adjust the dosage or even stop the drug altogether should side effects occur. Reversibility of side effects depends upon their nature and severity and upon the clinical state of the patient. Little information is available about the effects of discontinuing treatment on the AIDS virus, however there have been reports of a rise in the blood levels of the viral antigen.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths are known to have resulted from the use of the drug AZT.

Mr. Mellor: None that we are aware of. The Committee on Safety of Medicines has received three adverse reaction reports where patients being treated with Zidovudine (AZT) have died. Unfortunately all of these patients had a limited life expectancy due to the nature of their illnesses, and it is not possible to establish that any of these deaths resulted from the use of this drug.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence there is of the efficacy of the drug AZT *(a)* in prolonging the lives and *(b)* in improving the quality of life, of British AIDS patients who have been treated with it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I am advised that evidence for the efficacy of the drug Zidovudine (AZT) when used in the treatment of patients in the United Kingdom was published in January 1989 in volume 18, supplement 1 of the *Journal of Infection*.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many AIDS patients have been treated with the drug AZT; and how many are currently receiving it.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this information centrally.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital consultants held *(a)* full-time contracts and *(b)* part-time contracts with the National Health Service in: (i) 1979 and (ii) 1988.

Mr. Mellor: The numbers in England in 1979 and 1987, the latest year for which figures are available, were as follows:

	1979	*1987*
Full-time contracts	5,080	6,774
Part-time contracts	7,281	7,740

The number with part-time contracts includes university staff who have an honorary contract with a health authority.

District Health Authorities (Assets)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of assets disposed of by each district health authority during 1987-88; and what was the total value of those assets.

Mr. Freeman: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as can be obtained withour incurring disproportionate cost as soon as possible.

Cervical Cytology

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all district health authorities which operate a computerised call/recall cervical cytology programme for all women aged 20 to 65 years at three-yearly intervals.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 16 February at column *345*.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list all those district health authorities which have not yet called all women aged 20 to 65 years for a cervical cancer smear;

(2) if he will list the uptake of women called for a cervical cancer smear for each district health authority; and if he will list those district health authorities which are unable to provide these statistics.

Mr. Freeman: HC(88)1 stated that all women aged between 20 and 64 years should be invited for a cervical smear test within five years of implementation of computerised call and recall systems, unless their GP has indicated that they should be excluded. We are not, therefore, expecting all district health authorities to have completed this task until March 1993—five years from when their computerised systems became operational. Information on the number of eligible women screened for cervical cancer is expected to become available later this year when we receive health authorities' returns from Körner form KC53—"Adult screening programmes—cervical cytology".

A copy of HC(88)1 is available in the Library.

Spectacle Allowance (VDUs)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost to public funds for the current financial year of the spectacle allowance payable to staff in his Department who work on visual display units; what is the current allowance; and when it was last updated.

Mr. Mellor: The estimated 1989-90 cost of spectacles for staff in the Department working on VDUs is £10,000. The current allowance, updated on 1 December 1988, is £50 plus any eyesight testing costs.

Prescriptions

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will take steps to ensure that each prescription for medicine is accompanied by an information pamphlet describing the relevant drug's indications, side effects and withdrawal symptoms.

Mr. Mellor: No, but other measures to improve communication to patients about medicines are in progress.

At present there is no requirement on pharmaceutical companies to provide leaflets with medicines, but the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) encourages its members to do so. Under the Medicines (Leaflets) Regulations, such leaflets, if supplied, must specify contraindications, warnings, and precautions, and may specify indications for use.

The Council of Ministers of the European Community (EC) has reached a common position on a proposal to amend pharmaceutical directives which would, amongst other things, introduce a requirement to provide leaflets with medicines. It is expected that this directive will be adopted shortly.

Further, the EC Commission is following up a resolution of the Health Council of May 1987 requiring a report and, if appropriate, proposals for further measures to improve patient information leaflets. We understand the aim is to report to the Council by the end of the year. We shall consider constructively the Commission's report, when available.

Benzodiazepine

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will take steps to ensure that a health warning is given on all bottles of benzodiazepines prescribed to patients, to the effect that those medicines can cause dependence.

Mr. Mellor: I have no present plans to do so. The space available on medicines labels is limited. Leaflets offer greater scope for developing communication to patients about medicines.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds were allocated by his Department in 1987 to assist people dependent on benzodiazepines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: In 1987-88 the following grants were made under the central drugs initiative to services specifically for those dependent on benzodiazepines:

Mind (Copeland)—tranquilliser withdrawal scheme £33,541

North East Council on Addictions—tranquilliser advice and support scheme £40,662

Grants totalling £4,038,962 were also made to 97 other projects in 1987-88 under this initiative, some of which provided a service for those dependent on benzodiazepines. In addition the Government made available £6 million to regional health authorities specifically for the development of services for those experiencing problems with illicit or prescribed drugs.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the approximate cost to the National Health Service of the prescriptions issued for benzodiazepines by community pharmacists in 1987.

Mr. Mellor: We estimate that the approximate cost to the NHS of prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed by community pharmacists in Great Britain in 1987 was £30·2 million.

Drug Usage

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent in 1987 on giving advice on drug usage to general practitioners and hospital doctors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In the financial year 1987-88 almost £2 million was spent by the Department on giving advice on drug usage to professional staff working in the NHS. This expenditure is not broken down by professional group. In addition, health authorities provide their own drug information services. It is not possible to separate the cost of such services from the total pharmaceutical services provided by health authorities.

"Health for Year 2000"

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instruction he has given to the Health Education Authority on its work on, "Health for all by the Year 2000"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The World Health Organisation's "Health For All By The Year 2000" strategy is one of the considerations that all health authorities, including the Health Education Authority, take into account in developing their programmes of work.

Health Education Authority (Community Participation)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instruction he has given to the Health Education Authority on its work on community participation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: A number of specific action tasks were agreed at the ministerial accountability review of the Health Education Authority on 20 February. One of these was that the authority prepare, by the end of April, a report on the concept of community development and the way in which it might be taken forward in keeping with the authority's health education remit.

Meningitis

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the amount of financial support given to the meningitis trust for the purposes of research into meningitis and meningococal meningitis in 1980 and 1989.

Mr. Freeman: The trust did not exist in 1980 an has not recently applied to this Department for research funding. However, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 21 December by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science at column *292*, which listed research projects into meningitis supported by the Medical Research Council.

Pharmaceutical Industry

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce organisational reforms in order to separate more clearly the Department's sponsorship role with regard to the pharmaceutical industry from its regulatory role; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The two functions are handled by separate parts of the Department. Since 1 April the regulatory role of medicines licensing has become the responsibility of the Medicines Control Agency, so that the two functions are now more widely separated.

Limited List Prescribing

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement outlining the cost savings to his Department realised through the introduction of the limited list prescribing systems; and if he will indicate the precise manner in which that figure has been calculated.

Mr. Mellor: In 1985-86 the selected list scheme saved £75 million on the drugs bill. The savings in each of the seven therapeutic groups were:

	£ million
Cough and cold remedies	22
Analgesics for mild to moderate pain	19
Indigestion remedies	8
Vitamins	7½
Laxatives	2
Bitters and tonics	1
Benzodiazepine sedatives and tranquillisers	15½

These savings were calculated by comparing actual expenditure in 1985-86 with an estimate of the expenditure which would have been incurred in that year if the scheme had not been introduced.

It is not possible to make meaningful estimates for savings in subsequent years but we have no reason to doubt that significant savings continue to be made.

SCOTLAND

Geriatric Patients

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he has issued to health boards on the rate of provision of beds for geriatric patients and hospital places for psychogeriatric patients.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Guidance on services for the elderly and the elderly with dementia was set out in the SHARPEN (Scottish health authorities' review of priorities for the eighties and nineties) report, which was published, and commended to health boards, in November 1988. The report contained guidance about bed provision; it also stressed the need for a range of facilities, and for appropriate placement.

Police Rent Allowance

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* in tabular form details for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available of the total pay bill, compensatory grant received and income tax paid by each police authority in Scotland in respect of police officers' rent allowance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not held centrally in the detailed form requested, but the table shows the total sums paid by each police authority in the 1987-88 financial year by way of rent allowance and compensatory grant.

Police Authority	£
Central	1,278,493
Dumfries and Galloway	686,740
Fife	1,415,990
Grampian	2,396,359
Lothian and Borders	4,253,725
Northern	910,187
Strathclyde	17,982,163
Tayside	2,605,438
Total	31,529,095

This expenditure attracted 51 per cent. specific police grant.

Communications (Interceptions)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information was available to him when he decided not to call for a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde region on the illegal interceptions of communications in Helensburgh.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sufficient information on which to make a decision.

NHS (Capital Charges)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland from what date capital charges in the National Health Service will be charged in full; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As indicated in paragraph 4.1 of the Scottish working paper 5 "Capital Charging", published last month, it is proposed that capital charging will start to operate in Scotland from April 1991.

Highland Health Board

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 April, what were those matters of common interest discussed at the meeting with Highland health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is not normal practice to disclose the nature of informal discussions between Ministers and health boards.

Toxocariasis

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases have been reported in Scotland each year since 1979 of persons suffering from toxocariasis.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Toxocariasis is not a notifiable disease and this information is not held centrally. Between 1979 and 1987, six cases were admitted for in-patient care in Scotland.

Dog Fouling

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward proposals for legislation with regard to dog fouling to enable local authorities and police to take action against irresponsible behaviour on the part of dog owners.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is already an offence under section 48 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 for a person in charge of a dog to allow it to foul any of the places specified in that section. The Act is under review, and proposals for improvements in its provisions will shortly be the subject of consultation.

Community Charge

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East of 17 April, if he will make it his policy to collect from community charge registration officers in Scotland information on the uses made of electoral registers in compiling the community charge registers which they are currently operating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has no intention of making arrangements to collect information on the use made by community charge registration officers of electoral registers, or other sources of information to which they may have access, in connection with their functions.

Inward Investment

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all inward investment projects in Scotland in 1988 and 1989 to date.

Mr. Lang: Details of all individuals projects are not published as certain information is supplied by companies on a commercially confidential basis.

The figures based on company plans for inward investment in Scotland where there has been direct involvement by officials of Locate in Scotland or the Industry Department for Scotland are as follows:

	Numbers of projects	*Planned investment £ million*	*Planned jobs*
1987-88	84	324·2	11,219
1988-89	55	437·6	7,089

Locate in Scotland is aware of a further four projects which came to Scotland in 1987-88 without officials involvement and of a further five in 1988-89.

Locate in Scotland

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current staff establishment of Locate in Scotland; what offices are currently overseas; and what additional offices are planned.

Mr. Lang: The current staff establishment of Locate in Scotland is 60, of which 25 are based in field offices outwith Scotland. Overseas offices are located as follows:

Brussels 1; Tokyo 1; London 1; United States of America 4 located in Stamford, San Mateo, Houston and Chicago.

At present there are no plans to open additional offices elsewhere.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospital consultants held *(a)* full-time contracts and *(b)* part-time contracts with the National Health Service in Scotland in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1988.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital consultants in the NHS in Scotland

	Full-time	*Part-time*[1]	*Honorary*	*Total*
30 September 1979				
Medical	1,327	274	267	1,868
Dental	27	6	38	71
Total	1,354	280	305	1,939
30 September 1988 (provisional)				
Medical	1,529	305	295	2,129
Dental	31	7	41	79
Total	1,560	312	336	2,208

[1]Including maximum part-time.

Health Board Assets

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of assets disposed of by each health board during 1987-88; and what was the total value of those assets.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Income from the sale of surplus NHS land and properties amounted to £7·948 million in 1987-88, when the following properties were sold:

Land-property	*Health board*
GD surgery, Newmilns	Ayrshire and Arran
Broadfield hospital, Port Glasgow	Argyll and Clyde
Royal Victoria eye infirmary, Paisley	
Land at Caldwell House hospital, Uplawmoor	
Northern hospital, Dunfermline	Fife
Land at Royal Northern infirmary, Inverness	Highland
East block, Aberdeen royal infirmary, Woolmanhill	Grampian
24 North Silver street, Aberdeen	
Inverbervie health centre site, Inverbervie	
27-28 Park circus, Glasgow	Greater Glasgow
10 Park circus, Glasgow	
Schaw hospital, Bearsden	
13 Woodside place	
Ophthalmic institute, 126-128 West Regent street, Glasgow	
4 Royal crescent, Glasgow	
Killearn hospital, Killearn	
Glenfarg street clinic, Glasgow	
Farmland at Gartloch hospital, Glasgow	
Land at Craiglea place, Edinburgh	Lothian
Hozier house, Lanark	Lanarkshire
32 Bridge street, Kirkwall	Orkney
Dundee woman's hospital	Tayside
Land at Murthly hospital	
185 staff houses	Various
17 small plots of land	Various
Total value	£7,947,705·62

Income from the sale of other assets amounted to £145,000 (excluding the income from the sale of assets which are being replaced, which is netted against cost). Details of these assets are not held centrally but the income received by each health board was:—

Health Board	*£*
Argyll and Clyde	6,600
Ayrshire and Arran	2,800
Borders	47,200
Dumfries	7,750
Fife	Nil
Forth Valley	7,100
Grampian	5,850
Greater Glasgow	27,000
Highland	4,000
Lanarkshire	1,200
Lothian	27,500
Orkney	1,200
Shetland	2,200
Tayside	4,600
Western Isles	Nil

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list all those health boards which have not yet called all women aged 20 to 65 years for a cervical cancer smear;

(2) if he will list the uptake of women called for a cervical cancer smear for each health board; and if he will list those health boards which are unable to provide these statistics.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health boards have been asked to ensure that all women in the age range 20 to 60 in Scotland receive a cervical smear test by 1993. Information on the number of eligible women screened for cervical cancer will be collected from January 1990.

Cornton Vale Prison

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total average number per day during 1988 of females in Cornton Vale prison engaged in *(a)* work, *(b)* daytime education and *(c)* evening education; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: During 1988 the total average number per day of females engaged in those activities at Cornton Vale was as follows:

	Number
Work	123
Daytime education	39
Evening education	17

Attendance by inmates at daytime education is on a part-time basis. Evening education is available only between the months of January to March and September to December.

Alar

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the crops on which the chemical Alar is used and the purposes for its use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Pesticide usage surveys indicate that there has been a very small use of Alar in Scotland in recent years, on chrysanthemums in 1981 and on seed potatoes in 1987 as a growth regulator. The continued use of this chemical is being considered by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and its views are awaited.

Sewage (Dumping)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the life cycle in salt water of sewage dumped *(a)* in the firth of Clyde and *(b)* of the west coast of Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the health implications for fishermen fishing in the waters of the firth of Clyde of the dumping of sewage waste.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The only site in the firth of Clyde at which sewage sludge may be dumped under the terms of section 5 of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 is situated off Garroch head. Sewage sludge is an inert organic material which, through time, is dispersed by the natural action of the sea.

The Garroch head site is monitored annually by Strathclyde regional council and biennially by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland to assess the impact of sea disposal operations on the marine environment. There is no evidence to suggest that the site presents any hazard to the health of the public in general or to fishermen in particlar.

Sand Eels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vessels landed sand eels from Shetland waters in 1988 *(a)* before and *(b)* after 30 June; and how many of these vessels were under 50 ft registered length in each of these periods.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

	before 30 June	*after 30 June*
all vessels	6	4
under 50 ft	2	2

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the organisations to be consulted by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland over the proposed licensing arrangements for sand eel stocks by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland on 4 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Copies of the consultation paper have been given to Government Departments, fishing industry organisations, other organisations which have expressed an interest and have been made freely available to any individual or organisation requesting a copy.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Social Fund

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available on the terms of consultation with each social security office regarding the social fund budget for 1989-90; and whether there were any discussions with given offices about their particular patterns of allocations.

Mr. Needham: Social fund allocations for 1989-90 were made according to an objective formula and there were no consultations with individual offices. As explained in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) on 23 March at columns *739-42* I placed a note in the Library on 23 March setting out the basis on which the allocations were made.

Anglo-Irish Conference

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland upon what policy aspects of extradition and extra territoral jurisdiction further work is to be carried out by the Anglo-Irish conference, as referred to in paragraph 5 of the communiqué of the 5 April meeting of the Anglo-Irish conference.

Mr. Tom King: As provided by article 8 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the conference is concerned with policy aspects of extradition and extraterritorial jurisdiction as between North and South. A wide range of issues concerning the law and procedure on these matters is kept under review, to try to ensure effective procedures for dealing with the problem of fugitive offenders. Such issues include the provision for arrest and detention, the arrangements for the transfer of prisoners where extradition is ordered, and the procedural and other requirements which must be satisfied before extradition can be ordered. It would not, however, be appropriate to comment in detail on the substance of these discussions.

Loyalist Parades

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, in the report of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 1988 the figure of 1,865 loyalist parades includes youth organisation, church and other similar events; and what criteria the Chief Constable has used to define loyalist parades.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* This is a matter for the Chief Constable. I am advised that the figure of 1,865 does not incude parades organised by youth organisations, Churches and other similar organisations. However I understand that the categorisation of a parade as "Loyalist" is dependent upon the description of the event on the notice of intention to march given by the parade organisers.

Fair Employment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate how much public funds has been spent directly and indirectly in the United States of America and the United Kingdom on lobbying and information activity against the MacBride principles; and if he will place in the Library copies of any transcripts or evidence submitted by Government officials, representatives and members of the Fair Employment Agency to state legislatures in the United States of America.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* The explanation of Government policy and achievements in the field of fair employment in Northern Ireland is one a range of closely related tasks shared among the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland Departments and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including diplomatic posts overseas. It would be disproportionately expensive to seek to isolate the staffing and related costs of this specific aspect of their activities. However, from June 1985 until 31 March 1989 the overall costs of employing lobbyists and of assistance to individuals to give evidence was £375,579.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place copies in the Library of each decision of the High Court in Northern Ireland arising out of section 42 of the Fair Employment act 1976 relating to the current litigation concerning Tinnelly and Co. Ltd. v NIE.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* It is not normal practice to place High Court judgments in the Library, but they may be obtained on request from the Appeals and Lists Office, Royal Courts of Justice, Chichester street, Belfast 1.

PRIME MINISTER

Missile Exports

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will make it her policy publicly to repudiate allegations made in overseas courts about negotiations between Her Majesty's Government and other countries relating to the export of missiles to third parties against the declared policy of Her Majesty's Government;

(2) whether she will now make it her policy to answer questions about the supply of Blowpipe surface-to-air missiles where there are permissions given to forward them to countries other than those named on the end-user certificates; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. We do not reveal communications between Governments.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received about communications received since 1984 from the United States President or any official of the United States Administration to facilitate the supply of *(a)* Blowpipe surface-to-air missiles and *(b)* other armaments to Nicaraguan Contras; what was her reponse; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. we do not reveal communications between Governments.

Nicaragua

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if she will now make it her policy to reveal what was contained in the representations received in 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and in the current year in connection with the Nicaraguan Contras from the United States special envoy Mr. Lyle Cox or other United states representatives; if she will explain the purpose of these communications and her response; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. We do not reveal communications between Governments.

Government Advertising

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what conveniently available figures she has giving total Central Government spending on all forms of advertising in each year since 1979.

The Prime Minister: Information on publicity, including advertising, is not held centrally except where the expenditure incurred was through the Central Office of Information.

Details of departmental expenditure on publicity, including advertising, for the financial years 1979-80 to 1988-89 were supplied by Ministers in response to questions from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and published in the *Official Report* in November-December 1986, July 1987, December 1987-January 1988 and March 1989.

Information Officers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what response she proposes to make to the IPCS draft code of ethics, in respect of the proposals to strengthen the neutrality of Government information officers.

The Prime Minister: I have no seen the document to which the hon. Member refers, and have not been asked to respond to it. The duties and responsibilities of civil servants, including information staff, are set out in Sir Robert Armstrong's note of December 1987 and there are long-standing conventions on Government publicity. I do not believe that any separate code of ethics is required.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent disciplinary action has been taken against Government information officers in relation to their activities as trade union members; and for what reasons.

The Prime Minister: Disciplinary action with regard to individual civil servants is a matter for Departments. Information on such cases is not held centrally.

Director of Public Affairs (Scotland Yard)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister why the chief press secretary at No. 10 Downing street provided a shortlist of civil servants to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner for the position of director of public affairs at Scotland Yard; and which official was previously responsible for supplying such information to the police.

The Prime Minister: The chief press secretary, as head of the Government Information Service, was asked to advise on a replacement for the director of public affairs at Scotland Yard by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. A similar procedure operated when the head of the Government Information Service was director-general, Central Office of Information.

Chief Press Secretary

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what steps she takes to ensure that her chief press secretary is not involved in matters of a party political nature; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My chief press secretary is well aware of his duties and responsibilities as a civil servant.

Civil Servants

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the civil servants who have been subject to recent disciplining for having refused to undertake activities which they considered to be of a party political nature.

The Prime Minister: No. Any such action is a matter for the Department concerned.

Mr. Charles Powell

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister when Mr. Charles Powell will be leaving her private office; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Powell will serve in my office until it is time for him to leave.

WALES

Waste Disposal

Mr. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those operations for which sea disposal licences for the deposit or incineration of waste at sea have been granted under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply given to her on 18 April by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

NHS Staff

Mr. Allan Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many tutors and other staff were employed in the training and education of nurses in Wales in 1979, 1985 and in each subsequent year;

(2) how many people were employed in the training and education of nurses in Wales *(a)* by occupation category, and *(b)* by specialist category in 1979, 1985 and in each subsequent year;

(3) how many people were working in *(a)* National Health Service hospitals and *(b)* the National Health Service in Wales in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year;

(4) how many people were working in different occupational categories within *(a)* the National Health Service, and *(b)* the different occupational categories within hospitals in Wales in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year;

(5) how many people were being trained and educated *(a)* for a nursing career, and *(b)* in the different categories for a nursing career in Wales in 1979, 1985 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is available in tables 3.01 to 3.14 of issues of "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for Wales", copies of which are in the Library of the House. In particular, information for various nursing and midwifery staff grades may be found in table 3.10, although the more detailed figures published prior to the 1987 edition should be treated with caution since they are based on NHS payroll occupational codings of limited quality.

Rating Reform

Mr. Ted Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the number of additional staff required for the administration of the poll tax in each rating district.

Mr. Grist: Each district council in Wales will need to decide for itself on the number of staff to be employed in the administration of the community charge in its area in the light of its own individual circumstances.

Language Teaching

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new steps he will take to encourage the teaching of European languages, and in particular German, in Welsh schools.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Education Reform Act prescribes that a modern foreign language will be one of the foundation subjects to be studied by all pupils aged 11 to 16. This will begin to come into effect in autumn 1990 when all pupils in the third key stage (that is aged 11 to 14) will be required to be taught a modern foreign language for a reasonable time. The Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales have proposed that all the official languages of the European Community, including German, should be recognised for this purpose. In the meantime a working group is to be set up by July 1989 to advise the Secretaries of State on attainment targets and programmes of study for modern foreign languages with a view to beginning to implement these in schools from autumn 1992.

Home Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West of 10 April, *Official Report* column *396-97*, if he will identify the legislation that gives Welsh local authorities a statutory duty to enforce home safety legislation.

Mr. Grist: The Home Safety Act 1961.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital consultants hold *(a)* full-time contracts and *(b)* part-time contracts with the National Health Service in Wales in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1988.

Mr. Grist: Information for 1979 and for 1987 (the latest year available) is as follows:

Number of consultants[1]	*1979*	*1987*
holding full-time contracts	391	532
holding part-time contracts[2]	307	328

[1] As at 30 September.
[2] Includes consultants holding part-time, maximum part-time and honorary contracts.

Health Authority Assets

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of assets disposed of by each health authority during 1987-88; and what was the total value of those assets.

Mr. Grist: Details of all assets disposed of are not held centrally. Information about land and building disposals is available and is summarised in the following table. The total value of those assets was £1,671,000.

District health authority	*Property details*
East Dyfed	Allt Y Mynydd Hospital HQ Office Accommodation, Carmarthen Whitland Ambulance Station
Gwent	Newport Health Unit Works Department Garage at Darenfelin Cefn Mably Hospital—lease
Mid Glamorgan	Land at Quarella Road, Bridgend Former Workhouse, Bridgend General Hospital Tyn y Garn Child Guidance Clinic Land at Hensol Hospital Land at Maesgwyn Hospital Land at Penyfai Hospital Land at Cefn Cribbwr Health Clinic Residential accommodation at Albury, near Ware, Talygarn, Llantrisant, Talbot GreenHensol Hospital
Pembrokeshire	Llangwm Nurses Home Simpsons Cross Nurses Home
Powys	Residential accommodation at Welshpool
South Glamorgan	Chest Clinic premises, Cardiff Land at William Nicholl Home Residential accommodation at Cardiff

Cervical Cytology

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all health authorities which operate a computerised call/recall cervical cytology programme for all women aged 20 to 65 years at three-yearly intervals.

Mr. Grist: I understand that Mid Glamorgan and South Glamorgan health authorities currently operate a computerised cervical cytology programme for all women aged 20 to 64 with a three-yearly recall period. All other health authorities have adopted a five-yearly recall interval. Government advice is that priority should be given to offering a first smear to all women within the target age group rather than reducing the screening interval at this stage. Nevertheless, the recommended recall frequency is being kept under careful review.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those health authorities which have not yet called all women aged 20 to 65 years for a cervical cancer smear.

Mr. Grist: Since February 1987, when the Welsh Office sought to extend the existing cervical cytology screening programme in Wales to include younger women, all Welsh health authorities have implemented programmes to enable all eligible women to be offered a first smear from the age of 20, unless their GP has indicated that they should be excluded. As yet no authority has fully achieved this aim—although it is expected that some will do so this year.

The Department will be monitoring the progress of all DHAs towards this objective.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the uptake of women called for a cervical cancer smear for each health authority; and if he will list those health authorities which are unable to provide these statistics.

Mr. Grist: The administrative arrangements in use for running the cervical screening call and recall service in Wales have not permitted take-up ratios to be calculated with confidence. A new computer package which will provide such information has now been provided for all family practitioner committees' computers. Information on take-up rates will be forthcoming once the new system has acquired an adequate data base.

Vehicle Purchases

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many vehicles and at what value were purchased by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Welsh Development Agency and *(c)* other public sector agencies for which he is responsible, in 1988; and how many of these vehicles were British-made within the definition of British as set out by the Department of Trade and Industry in its arrangement on content with the European Community.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The information is as follows:

(a) Three; £20,703. These vehicles were United Kingdom produced on the definition employed by the Department of Trade and Industry for statistical purposes, under which a vehicle is classified as United Kingdom produced if the United Kingdom content exceeds 50 per cent. of the ex-works value.

(b) None.

(c) The purchase of vehicles by public sector agencies is a matter for those agencies and information is not held centrally. However, the following limited information is available; the definition of United Kingdom produced vehicles given under *(a)* applies:

Agency	Number and origin	Value £
Development Board for Rural Wales	One United Kingdom	19,835
Land authority for Wales	One non United Kingdom	16,000
Area Health Authorities Welsh Health Common Services Authority	Not known	1,546,302
Family Practitioner Services	One United Kingdom	7,000
Sports Council for Wales	[1]19	129,323

[1] These vehicles manufactured by a multi-national company could be United Kingdom or EC produced. This could be determined only by individual inspection of the vehicles.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will have *(a)* a Wales regional office in Cardiff, *(b)* a Wales development office in North Wales and *(c)* five Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution members serving in Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) where, and how many, inspectors of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution are based in Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will give the details of the proposed reorganisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in England and Wales, indicating where the main office which will serve Wales will be located; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* Proposals are being developed for the reorganisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in England and Wales in order to integrate its responsibilities for air pollution control, radioactive substances, water pollution and other wastes on a regionalised basis. Three regions are proposed to cover the north, south-east and south-west: Wales will come within the south-west region. The existing air district offices will be retained as outstations for the time being. There will continue to be a permanent office in Cardiff.

Six Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution inspectors are based in Wales. In addition, three of the inspectors in the Chester office spend part of their time inspecting premises in north Wales. Consultations with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment are in progress on detailed working arrangements for Wales, including the deployment of inspecting staff.

Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the large factories in Wales which must receive regular visits from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution because of their capacity to generate severe pollution problems; and if he will indicate the distances Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution must travel from existing offices to such factories;

(2) if he will list the principal factories in Wales which generate either severe or medium pollution problems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* All premises which dispose of radioactive waste are required to be authorised under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. Authorised premises in Wales are listed in the list of premises in England and Wales currently authorised under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. A total of 181 premises are registered under the Alkali &c. Works Regulation Act 1906 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Details are listed in the public register of works, which is available for inspection at Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution offices in Cardiff and Chester or at the Department of the Environment, 2 Marsham street, London.

Factories are visited by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution inspectors as necessary. Information on distances which inspectors travel to each factory could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Widows' Benefits

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out in detail the present position on widows' benefits, showing the ages and family circumstances which bring the various benefits into operation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The following is the present position on widows' benefits and takes into account my right hon. Friend's decision announced on 28 February 1989 at columns *161-62*.

Widows' benefits for women widowed before 11 April 1988

Widowed mothers' allowance—followed widows' allowance where the widow has a child for whom child benefit is payable. Child dependency increases paid for each child. This is paid in addition to child benefit.

Widowed mothers' allowance (personal)—followed widowed mother's allowance for widows where the youngest child is under 19 and has left school but remains at home and child benefit is not payable.

Widows' pension—followed widows' allowance if widowed over 40 and childless or on cessation of widowed mothers' allowance. Amount determined by age at relevant time, minimum rate payable at 40 and full rate at 50.

Widows' benefits for women widowed after 10 April 1988

Widows' payment—tax-free lump sum of £1,000 payable on bereavement if widowed under 60 or husband not retired.

Widowed mothers' allowance—paid from widowhood if the widow has a qualifying child. Child dependency increases paid for each child. This is paid in addition to child benefit.

Widows' pension—paid from widowhood if widowed over 45 and childless or, if over 45, when widowed mothers' allowance ceases. Amount determined by age at relevant time, minimum rate payable at 45 and full rate at 55.

Note: The foregoing does not give details of the contribution conditions that must be satisfied before payment.

Family Incomes and Tax Benefit

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North, 20 February, *Official Report*, column *481*, what is the net income after the Budget proposals have come into effect (i) after housing costs of a married man with children aged 13 to 16 years earning *(a)* £104 and *(b)* £105 per week, (ii) of a married man with children aged three, eight and 11 years paying average rent and rates as used in the tax benefit model tables earning

(a) £65 per week and *(b)* £80 per week, (iii) after benefits of a married man with children aged four and six years earning *(a)* £60 per week gross and *(b)* £140 per week gross, (iv) under current tax and benefit structure of a married man with children aged three, eight and 11 years with gross earnings of *(a)* £65 per week and *(b)* £105 per week and (v) under the current tax and benefit structure of a married man with children aged four and six years earning *(a)* £80 per week and *(b)* £90 per week;

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *27*, how many people earn less than the respective point at which the tax benefit withdrawal level falls to 34 per cent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

I shall let my hon. Friend have such information as can be obtained as soon as possible.

Customer Service and Efficiency

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the monitoring of customer service and efficiency in Department of Social Security offices in the north-west.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the monitoring of customer service and efficiency in Department of Social Security offices in Strathclyde.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In all Department of Social Security local offices, major areas of local office activity, including throughput of claims and payment accuracy, are monitored on a monthly basis against pre-set targets. Their scope has recently been extended from 50 per cent. to 70 per cent. of all local office activity. In 1988-89 all local offices began monitoring the quality of their service in areas such as caller times, correspondence and interviews, as well as sampling customer opinion of the service they provide.

Public Service Broadcasts

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will assess the likely implications for the transmission by Channel 4 of public service broadcasts emanating from his Department of the White Paper, "Broadcasting in the '90s: Competition, Choice and Quality".

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 16 March at columns *304-5*. I am not aware that the arrangements will be any different for Channel 4.

Spectacles

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many vouchers are outstanding for dispatch to patients awaiting part payment for spectacles; and how many patients have been waiting (i) less than one month, (ii) one to two months, (iii) two to three months and (iv) more than three months, for their vouchers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: National Health Service spectacle vouchers must be issued by the optician immediately following a sight test and are valid for a period of six months. Patients claiming help with the cost of spectacles under the NHS low income scheme must have a valid certificate of entitlement from the agency benefit unit for use, with the voucher, when purchasing the spectacles. Claims under the low income scheme cover exemption from, or help towards, a wide range of NHS costs and it is not possible to identify those claims which have been prompted by a need for spectacles. On 11 April 1989 a total of 41,300 new claims under the low income scheme were awaiting processing at the agency benefits unit: this represents 11 days' work. The stockpile of cases involving non-dependants which had accumulated at the unit have now all been cleared. Further information, in the form requested, is not available.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many instances have been detected in his Department of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* Trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether perpetrated by authorised or unauthorised users of computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded;

(2) if, in the light of his Department's computerisation, he will place in the Library a copy of the advice issued by his Department to the staff of regional and local social security officers on the threat of computer hacking;

(3) if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to his Department's computer files;

(4) what measures his Department has taken to protect data in transit by electronic means;

(5) if he will give details of his Department's policy on review of the security of its computer files;

(6) if he can quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in his Department;

(7) whether staff are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration; and what plans exist to deal with penetration of particularly sensitive systems.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 15 December 1988 at columns *693-4*.

In addition the following points may be of interest.

The Department's policy is to keep the security of its computer systems under continuous review to ensure the integrity, availability and confidentiality of these data and that the requirements of the Data Protection Act are met.

The Department takes advice from the appropriate Government authorities on security matters. In the case of sensitive data held on computers or transmitted by electronic means this includes the IT security and privacy group of the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. This advice is incorporated in the Department's formal computer security standards, which apply to all its computer systems. These standards include requirements for risk assessment, countermeasures, incident investigation and contingency planning. Staff who use computers are given appropriate security instruction. In the interests of security it would not be sensible to publish details of the security standards and procedures or of the training given in their use.

It is not the Government's policy to publish details and circumstances of computer security incidents, their perpetrators and their success or failure. Such information would be of assistance to potential attackers.

Benefits

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how may social security beneficiaries are paid *(a)* weekly in cash at post offices, *(b)* four-weekly by bank giro credit and *(c)* three-monthly by bank giro credit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The main benefits for which the option of payment by automated credit transfer is available are retirement pension and child benefit. The latest figures available are:

	Number
Retirement pension	
(a) Order book	6,730,961
(b) Four weekly ACT	1,461,891
(c) 13 weekly ACT	69,396
Child benefit	
(a) Order book—weekly	3,466,604
—four weekly	2,195,481
(b) Four weekly ACT	1,051,290
(c) 13 weekly ACT is not available	

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of paying social security beneficiaries paid four-weekly by bank giro credit in the middle of the four-week period rather than at the end of it.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There would be additional benefit costs, estimated at £177 million, in the first year due to the advancing of payments and a continuing cost due to loss of interest to the national insurance fund and consolidated fund, which based on current case loads and average payments and assuming an interest rate of 10 per cent. per annum would be about £18 million per year.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what administrative savings arise from paying social security beneficiaries by bank giro credit rather than in cash at post offices.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Based on current case loads and costs the administrative savings are estimated to be of the order of £25 million a year.

Earnings Rule

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the abolition of the pensioner earnings rule will affect women *(a)* below the age of 60 years and *(b)* aged 60 to 65 years who are drawing category B pensions, through the contributions of their husbands.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The position for these women from 1 October 1989 is as follows:

(a) Where a married woman below the age of 60 years is concerned, if her husband has reached age 65 and claimed category A retirement pension, he will continue to be entitled to the dependent adult's addition to his retirement pension in respect of his wife. The earnings rule of £34·70 a week attached to this addition will continue to apply.

(b) As now, a woman whose husband has deferred taking his retirement pension will not be able to claim her category B retirement pension. However, a married woman aged 60 to 65 years who can claim a category B retirement pension based on her husband's contribution record will not be subject to an earnings rule on her pension.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present prison officer staffing level at Wandsworth prison; what was the level set out in the Brisco report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of officers in post at Wandsworth prison on 17 April and the staffing levels recommended in the report of the regional manpower team to which the hon. Member refers are as follows:

	Recommended	*In post 17 April*
Discipline staff		
officers	302	302
principal and senior officers	57	44
Specialist staff		
officers	78	72
principal and senior officers	28	19

There is likely to be some increase in the number of staff in post at Wandsworth as more officers are recruited to the service over the next few months.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed prison officer staffing levels with the Governor of Wandsworth prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Staffing levels are discussed in the normal course between governors and regional management. Staffing at Wandsworth was also discussed by the governor and senior prison service officials during the industrial dispute earlier this year.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether extra prison officers were allocated to Wandsworth prison on 1 April under the national agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Staff required for 1989-90 under the terms of the fresh start framework agreement were recruited nationally before 1 April. The allocation to individual establishments is made on the basis of an assessment by management of their relative need. Wandsworth is likely to see some increase in the number of staff in post in the coming months.

Mr. Mark John Stone (Passport)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will examine the circumstances arising from the allegations made by Mr. S. N. Stone of St. John's close, Rugeley, Staffordshire in his letter of 22 March to the Head of Administration, Passport Office, India Buildings, Water street, Liverpool; and when Mr. Mark John Stone of the same address will receive his passport.

Mr. Renton: The Liverpool passport office replied on 3 April to the points raised in Mr. Stone's letter. The passport was posted to him on 10 April. A refund will be made in respect of the additional costs he incurred in obtaining a British visitor's passport while waiting for his son's standard passport application to be processed.

Foreign Citizens (Imprisonment)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state, against each country of

which they are a national, the number of foreign citizens presently imprisoned in the United Kingdom, setting out against each (i) the nature of the offence, (ii) the sentence imposed and (iii) the remaining term of imprisonment left to serve.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information about individual foreign citizens could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The readily available information is given in the following two tables. The recording of nationality for citizens of Commonwealth countries, Pakistan and the Irish Republic is not always reliable. The remaining term of imprisonment left to serve varies between individuals according to sentence length, date of reception into a Prison Service establishment, whether parole licence is granted and for how long, and whether full remission of sentence was earned; the readily available information gives the average remaining term for the sentence length group assuming full remission but without making allowance for parole.

Population of known foreign national prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 31 December 1988: by type of offence and nationality

Nationality	Offence									
	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft, handling fraud and forgery	Drugs offences	Other offences	Offence not recorded	Courts martial	Total
India	83	18	4	8	17	121	34	7	—	292
Pakistan	137	41	26	26	62	213	68	12	1	586
Other Asian Commonwealth countries	16	8	—	3	6	17	7	2	—	59
Nigeria	4	8	2	3	33	307	52	9	—	418
Ghana	3	2	1	3	4	53	12	—	—	78
Sierra Leone	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	3
Other African Commonwealth countries	18	4	3	10	9	34	14	6	—	98
Jamaica	114	43	28	57	22	119	40	15	—	438
Other Caribbean Commonwealth countries	33	19	9	18	9	34	12	3	—	137
Eire Other EEC countries South American countries USA	148	41	82	68	68	95	63	20	—	585
Other nationalities	95	34	41	37	84	212	71	17	—	591
Total	651	218	196	233	314	1,207	374	91	1	3,285

Population of known foreign national prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 31 December 1988: by length of sentence and nationality.

Nationality	Up to 1 month	Over 1 month up to 3 months	Over 3 months up to 6 months	Over 6 months up to 12 months	Over 12 months up to 18 months	Over 18 months up to 4 years	Over 4 years less than life	Life	Not recorded	Total
India —	3	4	14	9	46	168	48	—	292	
Pakistan	16	16	18	39	27	124	250	95	1	586
Other Asian Commonwealth countries	—	—	3	4	1	19	25	7	—	59
Nigeria	—	2	1	7	16	170	218	3	1	418
Ghana	—	1	2	—	2	33	40	—	—	78
Sierra Leone	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	3
Other African Commonwealth countries	—	2	4	5	7	35	36	9	—	98
Jamaica	1	5	13	28	27	151	181	32	—	438
Other Caribbean Commonwealth countries	—	—	3	5	7	44	62	16	—	137
Eire; Other EEC countries; South American countries; USA	3	10	28	37	58	190	192	67	—	585
Other nationalities	1	8	14	36	35	160	290	46	1	591
Total	21	47	90	175	189	974	1,463	323	3	3,285
Average time remaining to serve[1]	6 days	17 days	7 weeks	10 weeks	25 weeks	11 months	34 months			21 months

[1]Average time remaining to serve estimates assume full remission but make no allowance for release on parole. Estimates are based on those records for which an earliest date of release was available.

Parking Enforcement

98. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has now received the report of the working party on parking enforcement.

Mr. Hurd: The working party on parking enforcement has now submitted its report, which I am considering.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many instances have been detected in his Department of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether prepetrated by authorised or unauthorised users of computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded;

(2) if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to his Department's computer files;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *228*, if he can quantify the assessed risk of damage to sensitive computerised files;

(4) what measures his Department has taken to protect data in transit by electronic means;

(5) if he can quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in his Department.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It would not be in the interests of computer security to disclose such information.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of his Department's policy on reviews of the security of its computer files.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to her question on 15 March, at column *228*.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether staff are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; and whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As appropriate, staff are trained in such matters. Contingency plans exist where necessary, but their effectiveness would be reduced if details were made public.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the use of the public telephone network of the United Kingdom as a means of distributing obscene and offensive material in the form of computer bulletin boards accessible to any person using a home computer with a telephone; and if he will make a statement on his proposals to bring such practice to an end.

Mr. Renton: We have received some such representations. Computer bulletin boards are technically non-licensable cable programme services under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984, and the general provisions of the Act concerning obscenity, defamation and incitement to racial hatred apply to them. We are considering, in the context of the follow up to our recent White Paper on broadcasting, whether any further regulation is required.

Detective Sergeant Kenneth Morgan

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the years during which Detective Sergeant Kenneth Morgan worked with former Chief Superintendent Kenneth Etheridge.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner that former Chief Superintendent Etheridge served with the Metropolitan police company fraud squad from 1971 until 1977 when he retired from the force. Detective Sergeant Morgan joined the squad in 1974 and remained there until 1978. I understand, however, that throughout the three years during which the two men served with the squad they were not involved on the same work.

Her Majesty's Prison, Leeds

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish the prison department report into the conditions of young prisoners at Her Majesty's prison, Leeds.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on 10 April, at column *325*.

Firearms

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that police forces in England and Wales make use of application forms for the grant of a shotgun certificate which have been amended to comply with the provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988;

(2) whether he will advise police forces in England and Wales not to make use of application forms for the grant of a shotgun licence which are not in accordance with the provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The new controls on shotguns, prescribed in the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988, will come into force this summer. An amended form of application for the grant of a shotgun certificate will be prescribed in revised firearms rules which will come into force at the same time. In the meantime, the existing form of application prescribed in the Firearms Rules 1969 must continue to be used.

Football Match (Hillsborough)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what level the publication of statements on 18 April by South Yorkshire police concerning the conduct of Liverpool fans at the Hillsborough semi-cup final was authorised; if he will publish a copy of that statement and the name of the officer who made it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Statements made by officers of the South Yorkshire police are a matter for the chief constable. It would not be helpful for me to publish statements or counter-statements which have been made about the circumstances leading to the tragedy, or to name those who made them. It is for Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry to establish the facts.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements will be made for every

person involved in or affected by the Hillsborough tragedy who wishes to complain about police strategies, tactics, behaviour or practice at or appertaining to that event to be heard at Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry; if he will take steps to ensure that any such complainant will be able to make their complaint formally and officially; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the inquiry to determine the arrangements for hearing evidence which it considers will help establish the causes of the tragedy.

Statutory provision exists under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 for complaints by members of the public against the police to be dealt with thoroughly.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands force on whether any representations from the public appertaining to police activity and strategy at the Hillsborough tragedy will be admissible to the police inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Anyone who has information which he believes could help the inquiry should make this available to the chief constable of the West Midlands police without delay.

Football Matches (Safety)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory provision is made for the availability of oxygen and respiration equipment at football league and cup fixtures; what requirement there is to provide a contingency plan in the event of an emergency; how often safety arrangements are required to be reviewed; and who is responsible for enforcing such regulations.

Mr. John Patten: The Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 requires the operator of a sports ground designated under the Act to apply for a safety certificate from the local authority. Safety certificates, which are issued under the 1975 Act, contain terms and conditions which are necessary or expedient to secure reasonable safety at the ground in question when it is in use. They may include requirements for contingency planning, training and safety reviews.

The terms and conditions of a safety certificate and their enforcement are the responsibility of the issuing local authority.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received about assaults on police officers and emergency service personnel on duty at Hillsborough on Saturday 15 April.

Mr. John Patten: I am informed by the chief constable that information about any assaults on police officers has not yet been collated. The chief fire officer informs me that so far none of his staff has reported any assault. The chief ambulance officer reports that, so far, three staff have reported an assault but that the debriefing of his staff is not yet complete.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of South Yorkshire as to what arrangements are being made to return items belonging to deceased Hillsborough victims to their relatives.

Mr. Hurd: I understand from the chief constable of the West Midlands police, who is conducting the police inquiry into the Hillsborough tragedy, that the items, which it is thought may play an important part in the investigation, are being held temporarily. The police are conscious of the need to return these personal items as quickly as possible to the relatives of the deceased and are proceeding urgently with the investigation.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Relocation

99. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been received about locating civil servants out of London to the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Brooke: I have not received any such representations. However, Government Departments are now undertaking the serious and substantial relocation reviews referred to in the answer that I gave on 9 February 1989, at columns *751-2*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran); these reviews are directed towards finding sites which offer advantages in terms of the recruitment and retention of staff, value for money and operational efficiency. Decisions will be announced by departmental Ministers once the essential parts of the review process have been completed.

Government Advertisements

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those Government advertisements in the last three years to which the Independent Broadcasting Authority has objected or to which the authority has sought changes; and if he will make a statement about each such occasion.

Mr. Lilley: All Government advertisements comply with the requirements and procedures of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Petrol Prices

Mr. Amos: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent increases in petrol prices following upon his decisions in the Budget.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear in his Budget speech that he expected the full decrease in the duty on unleaded petrol to be passed on to the consumer. The evidence suggests that the new differential between unleaded and leaded petrol has been fully reflected in pump prices.

Computers

113. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has made any estimate of cost of providing free of charge a computer for every household in the United Kingdom linked to a national fibre-optic cable network.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* I have been asked to reply.

The costs involved would depend inter alia on the type of computer. There are some 18 million households connected to the national telecommunications networks.

PA Consulting Group in its report "Evolution of the United Kingdom Communications Infrastructure" estimated that a national fibre-optic grid, artificially advanced, would cost an additional £21 billion over 20 years. Computers can, however, be linked up whether or not the networks are fibre-optic.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committee on Sound Broadcasting

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if the will take steps to reconstitute the Select Committee on Sound Broadcasting.

Mr. Wakeham: I have no plans to do so at present.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what advice the Health and Safety Executive has offered arising from its recent visit to the House.

Mr Wakeham: None.

Ten-minute Bills

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council in what month he expects to bring forward proposals on the system of queuing for ten-minute rule Bills.

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot say at present.

Fire Drills

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed answering on behalf of the House of Commons Commission (1) on what dates fire drills have been held in the House since 1979;

(2) what procedures are followed in the House's fire drills;

(3) when a fire drill last took place in which *(a)* hon. and right hon. Members, *(b)* staff and *(c)* hon. and right hon. Members and staff were evacuated from the House.

Mr. Beith: Since 1979 fire exercises have been held as follows:

16 December 1980	House of Commons
17 September 1981	Underground Car Park
22 July 1982	Norman Shaw North
4 August 1982	Underground Car Park
25 April 1983	House of Commons
10 April 1984	3 Dean's Yard
11 December 1984	House of Commons
20 May 1985	St. Stephen's House
27 November 1985	Norman Shaw South
1 July 1986	2 The Abbey Garden
3 June 1987	St.Stephen's House
3 December 1987	House of Commons Zone 4
7 October 1988	House of Commons Zone 7
8 December 1988	Norman Shaw North
7 January 1989	7 Old Palace Yard
16 February 1989	3 Dean's Yard

The normal procedure is for the fire alarm to be activated and for all occupants of the premises, including both Members and staff, to evacuate the zone or building to a predetermined assembly point. These exercises are supervised by the fire officer and the London fire brigade has participated on a number of occasions. Plans to increase the frequency of fire exercises are already in hand.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will take steps to ensure that all industrial injuries to staff of the House are in future recorded and readily available.

Mr. Beith: Yes. At present information on those accidents which have been referred to DSS and classified as industrial injuries is held in individual staff personal files. In future, records of industrial injuries will be separately recorded by the Establishments Office and maintained in a central file.

Hazardous Chemicals

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what hazardous chemicals are used in the House of Commons; and what training is given to staff to deal with emergencies.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

A wide variety of potentially hazardous chemicals are currently in use by the parliamentary works office ranging from proprietary brands of correction fluid used by typists and descaling agents required for the central heating boilers. All are safe when used in accordance with the accompanying manufacturer's instructions and in accordance with the Hazchem code of markings.

Job-related training is provided where necessary.

An assessment is currently being made of any action which will be necessary to comply with the new Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 1988, which, for the most part, come into force on 1 October 1989.

ENERGY

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Parkinson: My Department has none of these printers, nor does it have any contracts for their use.

Oil Production

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the loss of production caused by the damage to Cormorant Alpha will require a review of the advice he gives the Ministry of Defence on the merchant shipping tanker requirements for the United Kingdom in the event of war or national emergency.

Mr. Parkinson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy gave on 14 February 1989 to his earlier question, at column 113.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many instances have been

detected in his Department of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* Trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether perpetrated by authorised or unauthorised users of computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded;

(2) if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to his Department's computer files.

Mr. Forth: It is not the policy of this Department to make public details and circumstances of computer security incidents, their perpetrators and their success or failure, since such information would be of assistance to potential attackers.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) whether he gives regular advice to the financial sector on how to guard against unauthorised penetration of their computer files by hackers;

(2) whether his Department issues advice to business about computer security;

(3) whether he gives regular advice to the financial sector on how to guard against unauthorised penetration of its computer files by hackers.

Mr. Forth: The DTI seeks to promote the development and application of standards addressing computer security, and criteria for the security evaluation of IT products, and to raise the awareness of the importance of computer security measures in business operations. Indivdual businesses should be addressing questions of computer security peculiar to them, as part of good business practice.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the use of bulletin boards for the transmission of private numbers, thereby enabling computer hackers to transfer charges to other people's accounts; and if he will make a statement on the measures he proposes to take to eliminate this activity.

Mr. Forth: I am not aware of any such representations.

The misuse of computers, and the use of bulletin boards by "hackers", are among the issues being considered by the Law Commission following the publication of its working paper on computer misuse. Its recommendations are expected before the end of the year.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in his Department.

Mr. Forth: The Department takes advice from the appropriate Government authorities when addressing the security risks to its computer systems.

In the case of sensitive but unclassified data, the Department can assess the risk of damage by hackers by using the CCTA's risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM).

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what measures his Department has taken to protect data in transit by electronic means;

(2) if he will give details of his Department's policy on review of its computer files.

Mr. Forth: It is not the Department's policy to make public details of computer security procedures or measures. In addressing the security requirement for computer systems, advice is taken from the appropriate Government authorities.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether staff are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration; and what plans exist to deal with penetration of particularly sensitive systems.

Mr. Forth: Staff in the Department are briefed on computer security issues. Procedures exist for recovering from incidents resulting in downtime of the Department's computer systems. It is not the Department's policy to reveal details of recovery plans for sensitive systems.

Soaps and Commodities

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to ensure that soaps containing mercury are not offered for sale to the public and that cosmetic preparations do not contain more than two per cent. hydroquinone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Cosmetics Products (Safety) Regulations 1984 (Statutory Instrument 1984 No. 1260) prohibits the use of mercury in soaps and limits the presence of hydroquinone in cosmetic products to 2 per cent. Regulations banning the use of mercury an limiting the presence of hydroquinone were first made in 1978 and continue to be in force.

The enforcement of these regulations is a matter for local authority trading standards departments.

Hazardous Wastes

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action he has taken to encourage the chemical and hazardous waste-producing industries to give more attention to changes in their production processes to enable reduction or recycling of waste.

Mr. Forth: My Department maintains very close links with the chemical industry through its trade association and by direct contact with individual companies. It is encouraging voluntary action by industry in the sphere of waste management which includes recycling and waste minimisation. I was pleased to note that the Chemical Industries Association introduced recently a programme of responsible care related to the environment which will be adopted by its member companies. This includes a code of practice and guidance on monitoring.

ENVIRONMENT

Air Conditioning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Government buildings are fitted with the wet-air cooling air conditioning systems; what action is being carried out to have them replaced by a different type of air conditioning system; what review he is instituting on the installation of this type of air conditioning in new buildings; what consideration is being given to requiring a different type of air conditioning system to be fitted in buildings where these are already installed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: With regard to those buildings designed and/or maintained by PSA, it has been, and continues to be, the general policy that air conditioning should be installed only where there is no practical alternative. For new construction, the policy is to install dry cooling systems—where practicable—in those buildings where air conditioning is necessary.

For existing buildings with evaporative heat rejection equipment (wet air cooling) a strict water hygiene treatment regime is applied, involving regular inspections and a complete review of the water treatment regime at least once a year, backed up by independent audits to monitor the effectiveness of the regimes and establish where improvements can be made.

In those leased Government buildings where the landlord is responsible for maintenance, PSA estate surveyors ask landlords to give written assurances that they have or will introduce similar practices.

PSA does not hold a central record of the number of Government buildings with wet air cooling systems. The highest concentration of such systems is in London, where there are currently 151.

Wet air cooling systems will normally be maintained in accordance with the strict regime explained above to the end of their economically useful life. The opportunity will then be taken to consider alternative arrangements utilising dry cooling principles wherever practicable.

Public Service Broadcasts

Mr Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will assess the likely implications for the transmission by Channel 4 of public service broadcasts emanating from his Department of the White Paper "Broadcasting in the 90s; Competition, Choice and Quality".

Mr. Ridley: There is no reason to suppose that the proposals in the White Paper will alter the present arrangements whereby public service messages are broadcast by Channel 4.

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Ridley: My Department does not use any Siemens ND3 printers either in-house or through a private contractor.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each of the Crown Suppliers' product supply, transport and buying agency businesses, in each of the three years before Civil Service departments were untied and in each year since (i) total sales, (ii) sales to Civil Service departments, (iii) sales to British Telecom, (iv) sales to British Rail and (v) average price rises in each year over that period.

Mr. Chope: The Crown Suppliers will not be operating as three separate businesses until 1 January 1990. The current information and accounting systems do not enable the business, particularly for product supply and the buying agency to be accurately identified. In addition, the sales figures shown include sales generated from activities which do not form part of the package for sale and which have been transferred to PSA during the last three months. The level of the Crown Suppliers' sales will, therefore, be markedly different in the future.

The following analysis has been split on the best estimate available for those functions to be included in each of the three businesses. Government Departments were fully untied from the Crown Suppliers on 1 April 1987.

£ million

	Product supply and services	*The buying agency*	*Transport*
1984-85	124·4	37·7	16·0
1985-86	130·8	39·9	18·7
1986-87	142·1	45·9	20·0
1987-88	145·5	38·5	21·7
[1]1988	146·1	36·6	22·9

[1] Calendar year.

Customer analysis
Total product supply and buying agency business

£ million

	British Telecom	*British Rail*	*Top 10 Government Departments*	*Others*
1984-85	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1985-86	12·9	0·8	129·1	27·9
1986-87	9·6	1·0	144·5	32·9
1987-88	7·7	1·4	141·9	33·0
[1]1988	8·2	2·4	136·8	35·3

[1] Calendar year.
n/a—Not available.

Average increases in TCS prices were as follows:

£ million

	Per cent.
1985-86	8·7
1986-87	6·7
1987-88	5·6
[1] 1988	5·9

[1] Calendar year.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to honour the commitment given to this House by his junior Minister that the pensions of the staff of the Crown Suppliers upon privatisation will be comparable to those they are entitled to under the principal Civil Service pension scheme.

Mr. Chope: When tender invitations are issued, prospective purchasers will be invited to offer pension terms to transferred staff broadly comparable to those in the principal Civil Service pension scheme. Detailed future pension arrangements will be a matter for the purchaser to discuss with the Government in the course of the sale.

Drinking Water

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will place in the Library the reasoned opinion received from the European Commission concerning compliance with the European Community drinking water directive;

(2) at what date he anticipates that United Kingdom drinking water will comply with the requirements of the European Commission directive (80/778/EEC) on the quality of drinking water;

(3) when he intends to respond to the European Commission's reasoned opinion on the failure of the United Kingdom to apply correctly the European Commission directive (80/778/EEC) on the quality of drinking water;

(4) when he intends to provide the European Commission with a timetable of compliance with the European Commission directive (80/778/EEC) on the quality of drinking water;

(5) whether the programme, timetable and cost of compliance with the European Commission directive (80/778/EEC) on drinking water will be included in the prospectus of each water authority prior to flotation;

(6) what will be the cost of compliance with the European Commission directive (80/778/EEC) on the quality of drinking water;

(7) when he intends to provide the European Commission with a costed programme of compliance with the European Council Directive (80/778/EEC) on the quality of drinking water.

Mr. Ridley: Both the European Commission and the Government regard the detailed, formal correspondence on infraction proceedings as confidential. The deposit in the Library of the recent reasoned opinion would be a breach of that confidentiality.

A formal response will be made shortly to the European Commission's reasoned opinion, which refers to the absence of United Kingdom legislation directly applying the EC drinking water directive and the fact that some supplies do not yet comply with the nitrate standard in England and the lead standard in Scotland.

The Water Bill and the regulations to be made under it will incorporate the provisions of the directive directly into domestic law. The Commission accepts that such legislation will enable them to close this part of the reasoned opinion.

Public water supplies to the United Kingdom are at present of a very high standard and most supplies already comply with the EC directive. We are fully committed to compliance with the EC directive as soon as practicable. Those supplies which regularly fail to meet a standard are being improved and should comply in the next year or two. However, two years after the directive came into force, and five years after we had notified the Commission that we were assessing compliance on an average sample basis, it informed us that every single sample had to comply. This has necessitated the preparation of detailed compliance programmes by water undertakers to meet the new interpretation, mostly for standards related to the taste and appearance of the water. These programmes are still being assessed and it is not therefore possible at present to state how long it will take to comply fully with the EC directive. However, discussions are taking place with the Commission about the time scale of the programmes and the technical difficulties involved.

The United Kingdom has already submitted to the Commission for its consideration detailed programmes by water undertakers to meet the nitrate standard in England and the lead standard in Scotland. We await the Commission's considered response to these programmes.

Each water undertaker has been formulating the long-term operating costs and capital expenditure programmes as part of setting the limit to price increases ('K') which is to be applied under the Water Bill to water undertakers. We are reviewing the cost projections which have been submitted to the Department and discussing them with water undertakers individually. We will not be in a position to give new forecasts until these appraisals have been completed. The compliance programmes, together with costings and timetables, will be included in the prospectuses to be published later this year.

Football Match (Hillsborough)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if, following the letter of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Minister for Sport, to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill of 11 April, he will describe the circumstances in which he would act upon the complaints of the chief executive of a football club about the inadequacy of ticket allocations at a semi-cup final or cup final; what account he took of police advice in reaching his conclusions; and whether he will review ministerial involvement in overseeing ticket allocation at major fixtures;

(2) what representations his Department received prior to the Football Association's semi-final scheduled for Hillsborough for 15 April about arrangements at the game; what consideration he gave to these representations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Member wrote to me on 22 March about the arrangements at the FA Cup semi-final at Hillsborough on 15 April. No other representation was received. The arrangements for the match will be among the matters to be considered by Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry.

Water Privatisation

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the flotation prospectuses for each water authority to be issued.

Mr. Ridley: November.

Football Spectators Bill

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account will be taken of the Hillsborough disaster and the judicial inquiry of Mr. Justice Taylor before the Football Spectators Bill is introduced in the House.

Mr. Moynihan: The timetable for the Football Spectators Bill will allow the House, in considering the Bill, to take account of relevant recommendations from Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry into the Hillsborough disaster.

Local Authority Staff (Pensions)

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any proposals for transferring the cost of pensions increase to the local government superannuation funds in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Yes. There are a number of cogent arguments for transferring pensions increase costs to the

funds in addition to basic pension costs which they already bear. It would help to make the true cost of local government pensions more apparent; it would accord with good accountancy practice; it would utilise the current significant surpluses in the funds; and, in the longer term, advance funding would generate its own investment income and reduce total costs.

For these reasons I have concluded that, subject to consultation with the relevant local government interests, regulations should be made to transfer these costs to the superannuation funds from 1 April 1990 onwards. I believe that such a transfer can be achieved without an overall increase in the total sum which local authorities currently spend on superannuation. I have in mind to remove the present requirement that the funds must be in a position to meet all foreseeable future liabilities, and to substitute a provision that they must be able at any point in time to meet three-quarters of their future liabilities. This would be entirely prudential, since the funds would at all times have sufficient capital to meet their obligations for many years ahead. In any case the entitlements of beneficiaries are underwritten by the employing authorities and do not depend on the funds as such.

If we proceed on this basis, I would expect that most local authorities in England and Wales would be able to reduce their total expenditure on superannuation below its present level, on average by about £6 per head of adult population. If, however, local authorities wish to suggest other ways of achieving the same objective, I will be ready to consider them. Meanwhile, I look to the funds' actuaries to work on the basis that the objective from 1 April 1990 will be as I am proposing.

River Mersey (Pollution)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of his Department's staff are responsible for monitoring pollution control in the Mersey.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* Responsibility for controlling and monitoring water quality and pollution in the River Mersey rests with the North West water authority. The Department, through Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, is responsible for the control of discharges by the North West water authority itself and had one full-time principal water inspector plus support staff engaged on this task.

Community Charge

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much a single adult in the county of Cambridgeshire would pay under *(a)* the community charge and *(b)* a local income tax based on national average earnings for 1988-89.

Mr. Gummer: Based on 1988-89 figures, a single adult on national average earnings with just the single person's tax allowance would pay a local income tax bill in Cambridgeshire district council of between £465 and £595. This compares with a community charge of between £186 and £231, disregarding the transitional safety net.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he is taking to discourage existing teachers from leaving the profession.

Mrs. Rumbold: The interim advisory committee estimated in its reports in 1988 and 1989 that fewer than 1 per cent. of teachers leave teaching for other paid employment and commented that this wastage rate was low. The attraction of teaching as a career can only be enhanced by the Government's education reforms.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the comments on teacher shortages made by the senior chief inspector in his report, "Standards in Education 1987-88".

Mrs. Rumbold: This report confirms the analysis of teacher shortages which forms the basis of our vigorous action programme to combat the problem.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to monitor the effect of teacher shortages on the implementation of the national curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department already collects data annually on vacant teacher posts and we shall continue to do so. Information regulations to be made under section 22 of the Education Reform Act will enable us to obtain annual information on the curriculum offered in schools and on teacher deployment.

Council of Science Ministers

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last attended a meeting of the Council of Science Ministers in the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster represents the United Kingdom at the Community's Council of Ministers (Research). He last attended a meeting of the Council on 14 March and gave a full report to the House in the reply given to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on 7 April, at columns 314-15.

Schools (Opting Out)

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department has issued any guidance to chief education officers regarding comments and information they are able to issue following a vote by parents in favour of a secondary school opting out of local authority control.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department wrote on 13 February to the chief education officer of every local education authority in England setting out my right hon. Friend's views on the conduct of ballots on whether a school should seek grant-maintained status. That letter made it clear that it is in the interests of parents, governors and others that all discussion about a possible application by a school should be well-informed. Accordingly, it asked local education authorities to ensure that any information they

provide is factually correct, and represents a proper use of public money. The same principles apply after a ballot as before.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to use his powers under the Education Reform Act to prevent a local education authority from issuing material designed to influence support for an opting-out proposal following a ballot by parents in favour of such a proposal.

Mrs. Rumbold: No. Where parents vote to seek grant-maintained status for their school the governing body must publish formal proposals to my right hon. Friend within six months. The local education authority and other interested parties may submit comments on or objections to those proposals within two months of publication, and my right hon. Friend will take these into account in considering and determining the application on its merits.

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department does not use any Siemens ND3 printers.

Computers

Miss EmmaNicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to his Department's computer files.

Mrs. Rumbold: Our policy is not to make public details and circumstances of computer security incidents, their perpetrators and their success or failure, since such information would be of assistance to potential attackers.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what measures his Department has taken to protect data in transit by electronic means;

(2) if he will give details of his Department's policy on review of the security of its computer files;

(3) if he can quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in his Department.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department takes advice from the appropriate government authorities on security matters. In the case of unclassified but sensitive data this includes the CCTA IT security and privacy group (part of HM Treasury) which is the central Government advisory authority in this area, and uses its risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM). It would not be sensible to publish details of actual counter-measures, reviews and risks.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether staff are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration; and what plans exist to deal with penetration of particularly sensitive systems.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department has contingency plans and staff education programmes as part of its wider information systems strategy, but their effectiveness would be reduced if details were made public.

AIDS

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on what research into drugs to relieve AIDS is taking place in Britain.

Mr. Jackson: The Medical Research Council is supporting a directed programme of research, worth £31 million cash over five years, to develop vaccines against HIV infection and drugs to relieve AIDS. Over half the research projects in this programme are related to drug development. Copies of a booklet outlining the programme are available in the Library. I understand that many of the pharmaceutical companies are also engaged in such work.

National Medical Centre, Hammersmith

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are, for 1994 to 1999, the estimated costs of the first five years of operation and installation of the new national medical centre at Hammersmith; and what would be the cost of keeping in operation for the same years *(a)* the Royal post-graduate medical school, Hammersmith, and *(b)* the clinical research centre, Harrow, respectively.

Mr. Jackson: The Medical Research Council is currently undertaking a detailed appraisal of proposals to improve clinical research in the United Kingdom, including proposals for a new national centre based at the Royal postgraduate medical school, Hammersmith. The costs of such a centre would depend on decisions to be taken in the light of this appraisal. Research costs at the RPMS and the clinical research centre in the period 1994 to 1999 will depend on a variety of decisions about research activities at these institutions prior to 1994 as well as on the outcome of the clinical research proposals currently being appraised.

Schools

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate how many schools currently have decoration classed as less than satisfactory.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department does not maintain records of the decorative condition of schools. This is a matter for LEAs and others responsible for the schools.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether all school buildings in England and Wales have yet been brought up to the requirements laid down by the 1981 schools premises regulations and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is the responsibility of local education authorities to satisfy the requirements of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. They certify that new school building projects will comply with the regulations when they seek my right hon. Friend's approval. The survey of school buildings, published in 1987, showed that not all existing county and controlled schools met the standards of the regulations. Since that time local authorities have spent substantial sums on improving their school buildings.

Schools in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much each local education authority will be receiving in the current financial year, and the next two financial years, from the school improvement programme.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on 21 December 1988 at column 287. Allocations are made on an annual basis. Information for the next two financial years is not therefore available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all schools in the English and Welsh counties which currently need *(a)* between £0·5 million and £1 million and *(b)* over £1·0 million spending on repairs, maintenance or decoration, to bring them into line with the requirements stipulated under the 1981 school premises regulations.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not collected centrally for schools in England. Matters relating to Wales are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether there are any schools which still have a problem with asbestos.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department does not keep records of asbestos problems in individual schools. This is a matter for LEAs and others responsible for the schools.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools currently have a shortage of furniture.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department does not keep records of the quantity of furniture in individual schools. This is the responsibility of LEAs and those responsible for schools.

Higher Education

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest estimate of places available in higher education in autumn 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* Applications to enter higher education in 1989-90 are estimated to be about 5 per cent. higher than last year. Actual numbers will depend on the recruitment decisions of each individual institution. We already have record numbers and participation rates, and expect to reach 1 million students for the first time this autumn.

Rating Reform

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to ensure that following the introduction of the community charge, institutions of higher education reduce the rents charged to students in respect of that element of their rents presently charged on account of the rates.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* This is a matter for individual institutions, but many students make no contribution to the rates payable on their accommodation, since they are provided for through the central funding of the institutions.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what his priorities are with regard to capital allocations to local education authorities.

Mrs. Rumbold: In formulating capital allocations priority is given to committed expenditure up to the levels previously indicated to authorities, new projects to meet population growth and new projects to remove surplus places in the schools sector and tertiary projects arising out of approved statutory proposals, and provisions for the capital implications of education support grants in further and higher education. The remaining resources are distributed to local authorities to use for the improvement or replacement of defective buildings. I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) on 11 April 1989, at column *426*, for the criteria applied to allocating resources for voluntary aided and special agreement schools.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the capital allocation to each local education authority as a percentage of the bid of that local education authority in each of the last nine years;

(2) if he will list the bids for capital allocations in the last nine years from all local education authorities.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on local education authorities' cash plans is not available for the years 1981-84. The information for prescribed expenditure for the years 1984-85 to 1989-90 is set out in the table.

Education capital allocation and plans at cash prices 1984-88
1984-85

£000s

LEA	*Plans cash*	*Capital allocations cash*	*Initial allocation as a percentage of plans*
Barking	695	1,442	207
Barnet	2,939	2,453	83
Bexley	1,399	845	60
Brent	2,576	1,678	65
Bromley	3,777	492	13
Croydon	1,749	1,227	70
Ealing	2,721	1,347	50
Enfield	901	576	64
Haringey	2,640	1,090	41
Harrow	2,785	523	19
Havering	894	216	24
Hillingdon	4,362	1,068	24
Hounslow	4,987	3,063	61
Kingston	2,673	1,330	50
Merton	2,098	993	47
Newham	4,232	2,039	48
Redbridge	1,971	1,006	51
Richmond	2,106	735	35
Sutton	1,011	451	45
Waltham	2,613	889	34
ILEA	22,045	9,703	44
Birmingham	9,533	6,484	68
Coventry	5,188	2,919	56
Dudley	5,460	3,516	64
Sandwell	3,453	1,705	49
Solihull	708	723	102

LEA	Plans cash	Capital allocations cash	Initial allocation as a percentage of plans
Walsall	4,116	1,026	25
Wolverhampton	3,890	2,375	61
Knowsley	1,174	895	76
Liverpool	6,973	4,243	61
St. Helens	3,031	2,111	70
Sefton	2,334	824	35
Wirral	4,114	2,117	51
Bolton	2,229	1,536	69
Bury	1,824	1,030	56
Manchester	11,180	6,997	63
Oldham	1,778	968	54
Rochdale	3,805	1,452	38
Salford	2,230	822	37
Stockport	1,540	1,770	115
Tameside	3,116	1,690	54
Trafford	1,631	1,027	63
Wigan	3,041	2,004	66
Barnsley	864	401	46
Doncaster	1,778	1,226	69
Rotherham	1,182	471	40
Sheffield	5,035	3,007	60
Bradford	18,220	6,707	37
Calderdale	3,408	1,090	32
Kirklees	6,746	3,753	56
Leeds	5,184	2,899	56
Wakefield	3,993	1,596	40
Gateshead	3,934	572	15
Newcastle	3,600	2,265	63
North Tyneside	3,673	721	20
South Tyneside	3,765	1,280	34
Sunderland	4,354	2,862	66
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0
Avon	11,121	5,270	47
Bedfordshire	4,534	2,439	54
Berkshire	10,238	8,227	80
Buckinghamshire	18,602	6,854	37
Cambridgeshire	6,655	5,039	76
Cheshire	10,594	7,366	70
Cleveland	7,463	3,626	49
Cornwall	6,943	4,377	63
Cumbria	8,026	3,982	50
Derbyshire	9,885	6,546	66
Devon	9,087	7,832	86
Dorset	8,744	5,385	62
Durham	4,271	2,054	48
East Sussex	10,389	4,601	44
Essex	17,675	6,604	37
Gloucestershire	6,416	2,772	43
Hampshire	20,652	9,666	47
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	3,378	1,669	49
Hertfordshire	5,912	5,479	93
Humberside	11,677	6,883	59
Isle of Wight	1,445	948	66
Kent	8,716	4,347	50
Lancashire	13,646	11,055	81
Leicestershire	8,229	7,074	86
Lincolnshire	9,022	4,455	49
Norfolk	7,771	4,261	55
North Yorkshire	11,725	5,675	48
Northamptonshire	7,059	4,179	59
Northumberland	2,580	1,002	39
Nottinghamshire	4,376	2,666	61
Oxfordshire	4,194	3,245	77
Shropshire	4,359	2,072	48
Somerset	3,367	2,559	76
Staffordshire	15,277	10,691	70
Suffolk	5,554	4,348	78
Surrey	8,416	4,340	52
Warwickshire	2,781	1,428	51
West Sussex	6,544	5,027	77
Wiltshire	6,771	3,810	56

1985-86

LEA	Plans cash	Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a per cent. of plans
Barking	1,579	947	60
Barnet	5,825	2,612	45
Bexley	1,396	504	36
Brent	4,619	891	19
Bromley	4,518	628	14
Croydon	3,626	2,170	60
Ealing	3,352	2,451	73
Enfield	1,375	966	70
Haringey	3,644	895	25
Harrow	3,007	299	10
Havering	1,013	334	33
Hillingdon	2,368	521	22
Hounslow	4,638	1,566	34
Kingston	4,070	2,131	52
Merton	4,226	2,277	54
Newham	7,672	2,558	33
Redbridge	1,738	1,330	77
Richmond	752	379	50
Sutton	966	474	49
Waltham	2,334	985	42
ILEA	27,686	15,080	54
Birmingham	6,569	3,695	56
Coventry	7,419	3,094	42
Dudley	7,016	2,671	38
Sandwell	4,429	1,914	43
Solihull	1,297	642	49
Walsall	3,222	1,329	41
Wolverhampton	3,793	2,047	54
Knowsley	1,986	973	49
Liverpool	8,461	4,870	58
St. Helens	3,190	1,827	57
Sefton	2,060	1,671	81
Wirral	2,585	766	30
Bolton	1,317	570	43
Bury	1,507	803	53
Manchester	17,545	7,450	42
Oldham	2,650	1,014	38
Rochdale	2,885	1,802	62
Salford	2,891	1,551	54
Stockport	2,691	1,411	52
Tameside	1,360	532	39
Trafford	3,208	1,594	50
Wigan	3,990	1,464	37
Barnsley	1,226	1,090	89
Doncaster	1,353	424	31
Rotherham	1,751	481	27
Sheffield	8,044	3,497	43
Bradford	13,383	8,269	62
Calderdale	2,305	830	36
Kirklees	6,955	3,304	48
Leeds	9,301	3,325	36
Wakefield	3,307	1,438	43
Gateshead	3,714	1,122	30
Newcastle	3,948	1,716	43
North Tyneside	4,300	2,235	52
South Tyneside	2,851	1,339	47

LEA	Plans cash	Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a per cent. of plans
Sunderland	4,679	3,047	65
Isles of Scilly	0	0	—
Avon	10,965	3,951	36
Bedfordshire	5,427	1,625	30
Berkshire	11,584	7,490	65
Buckinghamshire	12,649	5,978	47
Cambridge	6,506	4,387	67
Cheshire	9,518	5,005	53
Cleveland	7,482	4,493	60
Cornwall	4,523	3,319	73
Cumbria	5,254	3,803	72
Derbyshire	10,794	7,239	67
Devon	11,046	6,405	58
Dorset	8,666	5,265	61
Durham	6,415	2,995	47
East Sussex	7,993	4,870	61
Essex	28,705	11,679	41
Gloucester	7,261	4,652	64
Hampshire	23,877	11,844	50
Hereford and Worcester	2,688	1,480	55
Hertford	8,417	5,960	71
Humberside	7,400	4,138	56
Isle of Wight	2,125	1,230	58
Kent	9,481	5,209	55
Lancashire	20,050	15,156	76
Leicester	12,299	6,718	55
Lincoln	8,834	3,532	40
Norfolk	6,698	3,070	46
North Yorkshire	6,625	3,798	57
Northampton	6,268	4,492	72
Northumberland	2,322	1,254	54
Nottinghamshire	4,810	3,421	71
Oxfordshire	9,134	3,650	40
Shropshire	5,680	3,924	69
Somerset	2,941	1,243	42
Staffs	13,621	9,717	71
Suffolk	6,505	3,871	60
Surrey	9,717	4,365	45
Warwick	3,105	1,703	55
West Sussex	5,641	3,429	61
Wiltshire	6,314	3,478	55

LEA	1986-87 Plans Cash	1986-87 Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a percentage of plans
Barking	3,717	1,135	31
Barnet	7,399	1,621	22
Bexley	2,096	715	34
Brent	4,797	1,589	33
Bromley	3,357	1,747	52
Croydon	3,519	2,784	79
Ealing	5,702	2,154	38
Enfield	1,698	706	42
Haringey	4,455	797	18
Harrow	5,315	4,078	77
Havering	1,074	395	37
Hillingdon	1,806	306	17
Hounslow	4,783	668	14
Kingston	6,445	1,806	28
Merton	3,959	1,203	30
Newham	6,825	1,271	19
Redbridge	2,167	1,149	53
Richmond	1,050	249	24
Sutton	1,318	329	25
Waltham	3,962	2,184	55
ILEA	29,331	12,575	43
Birmingham	9,015	5,016	56
Coventry	15,086	5,396	35

LEA	1986-87 Plans Cash	1986-87 Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a percentage of plans
Dudley	6,703	2,012	30
Sandwell	4,091	1,203	29
Solihull	2,666	1,295	49
Walsall	3,711	1,119	30
Wolverhampton	6,664	1,418	21
Knowsley	2,750	1,483	54
Liverpool	7,878	2,904	37
St. Helens	2,325	772	33
Sefton	3,983	2,667	67
Wirral	2,824	1,402	50
Bolton	1,692	576	34
Bury	995	882	89
Manchester	21,998	6,501	30
Oldham	2,910	1,428	49
Rochdale	4,545	2,163	48
Salford	3,382	1,625	48
Stockport	3,702	1,453	39
Tameside	1,685	306	18
Trafford	2,702	1,276	47
Wigan	3,243	2,339	72
Barnsley	1,054	577	55
Doncaster	771	338	44
Rotherham	1,651	578	35
Sheffield	7,890	2,330	30
Bradford	10,116	7,061	70
Calderdale	1,708	1,203	70
Kirklees	7,548	1,956	26
Leeds	8,557	2,634	31
Wakefield	3,284	1,990	61
Gateshead	4,968	1,451	29
Newcastle	8,641	2,586	30
North Tyneside	3,210	1,536	48
South Tyneside	2,911	732	25
Sunderland	7,188	1,928	27
Isles of Scilly	0	0	—
Avon	10,821	4,070	38
Bedfordshire	6,282	1,934	31
Berkshire	10,696	5,399	50
Buckinghamshire	15,970	5,582	35
Cambridgeshire	4,910	2,591	53
Cheshire	11,327	3,837	34
Cleveland	12,605	4,933	39
Cornwall	7,583	3,592	47
Cumbria	5,640	2,254	40
Derbyshire	13,942	7,202	52
Devonshire	16,957	8,418	50
Dorset	8,255	3,377	41
Durham	6,264	2,231	36
East Sussex	10,176	3,786	37
Essex	31,384	11,417	36
Gloucestershire	10,306	6,561	64
Hampshire	29,354	12,905	44
Hereford and Worcestershire	3,911	1,929	49
Hertfordshire	10,968	4,677	43
Humberside	10,802	7,524	70
Isle of Wight	2,270	1,139	50
Kent	9,801	6,405	65
Lancashire	21,743	12,538	58
Leicestershire	12,311	7,061	57
Lincolnshire	6,044	3,908	65
Norfolk	7,004	4,394	63
North Yorkshire	5,576	2,504	45
Northamptonshire	7,536	4,339	58
Northumberland	2,687	1,003	37
Nottinghamshire	5,847	3,043	52
Oxfordshire	13,423	2,055	15

1986-87

LEA	Plans Cash	Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a percentage of plans
Shropshire	5,277	2,602	49
Somerset	6,832	2,014	29
Staffordshire	17,517	9,313	53
Suffolk	8,619	5,866	68
Surrey	11,030	3,610	33
Warwickshire	2,993	1,236	41
West Sussex	6,116	2,157	35
Wiltshire	4,556	1,983	44

LEA	Plans cash	1987-88 capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a percentage of plans
Barking	2,126	806	38
Barnet	11,234	1,744	16
Bexley	2,692	1,641	61
Brent	8,249	2,514	30
Bromley	3,283	1,618	49
Croydon	5,305	2,428	46
Ealing	7,624	2,147	28
Enfield	2,980	1,222	41
Haringey	8,427	1,121	13
Harrow	5,525	2,952	53
Havering	1,093	393	36
Hillingdon	3,782	1,059	28
Hounslow	5,259	1,255	24
Kingston	9,674	1,683	17
Merton	2,390	1,054	44
Newham	5,000	1,165	23
Redbridge	2,935	1,761	60
Richmond	1,275	115	9
Sutton	1,966	247	13
Waltham	5,276	2,585	49
ILEA	44,342	14,957	34
Birmingham	11,141	3,860	35
Coventry	12,364	5,709	46
Dudley	5,067	1,329	26
Sandwell	2,955	576	19
Solihull	1,778	500	28
Walsall	2,483	824	33
Wolverhampton	7,088	1,932	27
Knowsley	5,510	1,108	20
Liverpool	10,072	1,885	19
St. Helens	4,953	855	17
Sefton	4,616	1,790	39
Wirral	4,826	1,316	27
Bolton	1,934	645	33
Bury	996	320	32
Manchester	32,669	8,968	27
Oldham	4,809	2,799	58
Rochdale	5,493	2,220	40
Salford	3,016	1,882	62
Stockport	4,004	1,243	31
Tameside	1,884	389	21
Trafford	2,947	1,064	36
Wigan	4,550	2,717	60
Barnsley	1,073	530	49
Doncaster	403	365	91
Rotherham	2,336	287	12
Sheffield	10,762	3,197	30
Bradford	24,853	6,303	25
Calderdale	3,381	1,883	56
Kirklees	8,782	1,664	19
Leeds	12,502	2,802	22
Wakefield	5,210	2,074	40
Gateshead	4,073	1,112	27
Newcastle	9,479	3,369	36
North Tyneside	4,498	1,935	43
South Tyneside	5,121	1,932	38
Sunderland	13,391	2,305	17
Isles of Scilly	60	30	50
Avon	10,865	4,386	40
Bedfordshire	4,814	1,248	26
Berkshire	8,281	3,597	43
Buckinghamshire	10,384	6,004	58
Cambridgeshire	10,016	3,399	34
Cheshire	9,420	5,043	54
Cleveland	8,539	4,351	51
Cornwall	8,061	5,645	70
Cumbria	6,224	2,852	46
Derbyshire	20,028	9,036	45
Devon	11,291	4,734	42
Dorset	9,577	4,349	45
Durham	6,263	1,371	22
East Sussex	15,038	4,884	32
Essex	34,169	11,600	34
Gloucester	10,302	7,167	70
Hampshire	28,643	10,918	38
Hereford and West	5,633	2,585	46
Hertfordshire	14,293	4,100	29
Humberside	14,865	10,753	72
Isle of Wight	3,192	1,375	43
Kent	13,345	7,514	56
Lancashire	18,800	5,994	32
Leicester	13,336	5,526	41
Lincoln	7,745	4,625	60
Norfolk	7,864	5,019	64
North Yorkshire	5,150	2,035	40
Northamptonshire	5,132	1,726	34
Northumberland	2,060	655	32
Nottinghamshire	5,512	2,379	43
Oxfordshire	11,326	1,942	17
Shropshire	8,486	5,257	62
Somerset	6,220	2,626	42
Staffordshire	18,219	7,591	42
Suffolk	8,830	6,683	76
Surrey	9,339	3,828	41
Warwickshire	3,473	1,101	32
West Sussex	7,420	1,739	23
Wiltshire	7,021	3,177	45

1988-89

£000s

LEA	Plans cash	Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a percentage of plans
Barking	10,457	1,639	16
Barnet	11,192	2,000	18
Bexley	1,758	1,234	70
Brent	6,758	2,532	37
Bromley	6,098	403	7
Croydon	7,149	1,595	22
Ealing	9,053	1,174	13
Enfield	9,504	1,318	14
Haringey	11,042	2,330	21
Harrow	3,862	1,643	43
Havering	1,962	692	35
Hillingdon	6,307	918	15
Hounslow	4,860	1,242	26
Kingston	11,731	1,695	14
Merton	6,965	1,023	15
Newham	6,316	3,061	48
Redbridge	5,418	3,719	69

LEA	Plans cash	Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as a percentage of plans
Richmond	2,210	277	13
Sutton	6,063	627	10
Waltham	7,120	5,498	77
ILEA	54,545	17,767	33
Birmingham	11,472	4,407	38
Coventry	17,980	6,155	34
Dudley	7,773	1,555	20
Sandwell	3,710	767	21
Solihull	4,890	700	14
Walsall	2,210	907	41
Wolverhampton	7,823	1,849	24
Knowsley	4,815	1,136	24
Liverpool	7,692	2,323	30
St. Helens	5,685	1,211	21
Sefton	2,778	1,450	52
Wirral	6,391	2,330	36
Bolton	3,866	1,212	31
Bury	1,282	467	36
Manchester	34,860	9,269	27
Oldham	5,793	2,822	49
Rochdale	5,654	1,440	25
Salford	5,740	3,430	60
Stockport	3,891	2,878	74
Tameside	2,781	716	26
Trafford	2,637	471	18
Wigan	5,308	3,508	66
Barnsley	1,198	342	29
Doncaster	644	421	65
Rotherham	2,184	699	32
Sheffield	17,815	7,189	40
Bradford	33,604	10,457	31
Calderdale	5,486	3,619	66
Kirklees	9,078	1,486	16
Leeds	14,280	4,626	32
Wakefield	6,397	3,573	56
Gateshead	5,420	1,933	36
Newcastle	12,946	3,917	30
North Tyneside	4,587	2,129	46
South Tyneside	5,939	2,527	43
Sunderland	10,951	4,583	42
Isles of Scilly	405	39	10
Avon	10,993	4,277	39
Bedfordshire	5,660	1,630	29
Berkshire	12,603	5,567	44
Buckinghamshire	9,013	6,152	68
Cambridgeshire	13,719	4,314	31
Cheshire	10,812	4,829	45
Cleveland	7,104	3,673	52
Cornwall	9,744	6,413	66
Cumbria	6,530	4,858	74
Derbyshire	15,025	10,777	72
Devon	10,732	6,262	58
Dorset	8,459	4,052	48
Durham	5,451	1,415	26
East Sussex	25,962	9,815	38
Essex	37,264	20,317	55
Gloucestershire	9,864	5,302	32
Hampshire	38,619	16,550	43
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	9,032	2,892	32
Hertfordshire	18,887	5,525	29
Humberside	13,333	7,077	53
Isle of Wight	4,377	1,663	38
Kent	15,217	7,134	47
Lancashire	25,419	12,809	50
Leicestershire	15,643	7,419	47
Lincolnshire	8,891	3,897	44
Norfolk	7,938	4,021	51
North Yorkshire	7,297	3,937	54
Northamptonshire	8,571	3,190	37
Northumberland	3,554	955	27
Nottinghamshire	4,709	2,461	52
Oxfordshire	18,701	4,673	25
Shropshire	8,474	4,465	53
Somerset	6,501	2,764	43
Staffordshire	15,494	7,469	48
Suffolk	9,448	7,014	74
Surrey	15,468	4,859	31
Warwickshire	4,069	1,375	34
West Sussex	10,851	3,053	28
Wiltshire	6,867	3,215	47

LEA	Plans cash	1989-90 Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as percent. of plans
Barking	1,429	245	17
Barnet	5,954	996	17
Bexley	3,336	864	26
Brent	4,939	463	9
Bromley	6,338	663	10
Croydon	6,487	1,008	16
Ealing	10,487	540	5
Enfield	6,847	1,153	17
Haringey	6,237	2,275	36
Harrow	7,423	650	9
Havering	4,912	1,341	27
Hillingdon	5,132	644	13
Hounslow	8,173	529	6
Kingston	9,756	316	3
Merton	11,393	5,243	46
Newham	7,944	3,590	45
Redbridge	5,241	2,028	39
Richmond	2,826	540	19
Sutton	11,995	649	5
Waltham	13,259	8,013	60
ILEA	38,931	11,957	31
Birmingham	13,206	5,218	40
Coventry	15,815	2,670	17
Dudley	5,621	2,531	45
Sandwell	4,462	2,080	47
Solihull	4,084	744	18
Walsall	3,190	921	29
Wolverhampton	3,810	528	14
Knowsley	6,413	2,116	33
Liverpool	6,121	607	10
St. Helens	4,597	1,851	40
Sefton	4,728	1,724	36
Wirral	6,817	2,469	36
Bolton	4,208	1,286	31
Bury	1,055	605	57
Manchester	26,053	5,271	20
Oldham	6,654	2,272	34
Rochdale	7,094	2,175	31
Salford	5,717	3,806	67
Stockport	3,822	1,519	40
Tameside	2,863	746	26
Trafford	20,581	2,671	13
Wigan	7,057	1,364	19
Barnsley	1,665	270	16
Doncaster	1,059	684	65
Rotheham	2,647	840	32
Sheffield	9,204	5,211	57

LEA	Plans cash	1989-90 Capital allocation cash	Initial allocation as percent. of plans
Bradford	27,879	8,334	30
Calderdale	4,135	2,607	63
Kirklees	5,406	808	15
Leeds	17,367	3,464	20
Wakefield	5,296	3,212	61
Gateshead	5,263	1,052	20
Newcastle	9,148	1,566	17
North Tyneside	5,853	1,577	27
South Tyneside	9,846	3,372	34
Sunderland	10,269	3,859	38
Isles of Scilly	149	149	100
Avon	12,427	3,877	31
Bedfordshire	6,120	2,022	33
Berkshire	13,676	5,876	43
Buckinghamshire	12,370	7,780	63
Cambridgeshire	21,003	5,801	28
Cheshire	12,507	3,487	28
Cleveland	7,450	5,324	71
Cornwall	11,803	6,129	52
Cumbria	10,156	6,753	66
Derbyshire	22,530	11,669	52
Devon	23,329	14,177	61
Dorset	11,083	2,970	27
Durham	14,756	2,133	14
East Sussex	25,515	9,171	36
Essex	54,816	17,002	31
Gloucestershire	14,180	5,934	42
Hampshire	28,586	7,940	28
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	9,134	2,534	28
Hertfordshire	16,561	4,832	29
Humberside	13,240	7,288	55
Isle of Wight	6,678	1,628	24
Kent	24,492	8,610	35
Lancashire	34,170	13,664	40
Leicestershire	12,785	6,769	53
Lincolnshire	8,599	3,010	35
Norfolk	10,892	3,788	35
North Yorkshire	6,899	2,209	32
Northamptonshire	9,049	4,046	45
Northumberland	5,234	889	17
Nottinghamshire	7,408	3,215	43
Oxfordshire	15,971	3,758	24
Shropshire	8,010	4,943	62
Somerset	15,865	3,088	19
Staffordshire	11,544	4,927	43
Suffolk	13,315	6,086	46
Surrey	12,460	5,735	46
Warwickshire	6,275	1,729	28
West Sussex	12,953	1,966	15
Wiltshire	10,455	2,866	27

CIVIL SERVICE

"Government Economic Statistics"

90. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what are the implications for him as the Minister for the Civil Service of the publication of the scrutiny report entitled "Government Economic Statistics".

Mr. Luce: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, I welcome any initiative that increases the efficiency of the Civil Service, and I am pleased that the Central Statistical Office is to be established as an executive agency.

Quality of Service

96. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how he intends to improve the quality of service given by civil servants.

Mr. Luce: Improving delivery of services to the public is one of the major aims of the next steps initiative. In December 1988 my Department published a paper intended to stimulate discussion of this important area.

Equal Opportunities

97. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service whether he will make a statement on the progress of monitoring exercises carried out in the Civil Service in accordance with the codes of the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. Luce: The Civil Service is making good progress in monitoring the implementation of its equal opportunity policies. Monitoring and follow-up action is carried out by departments and the Civil Service Commission in accordance with the Commission for Racial Equality and Equal Opportunities Commission codes of practice.

THE ARTS

Museums and Galleries

68. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Minister for the Arts to what extent he is providing for the building and maintenance of museums and galleries.

Mr. Luce: I am continuing to give high priority to building and maintenance in our national museums and galleries. Spending on building and maintenance will increase to £55 million by 1991-92, which represents an increase of 53 per cent. since 1987-88.

83. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission to discuss the future funding and administration of national museums.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission quite frequently and on a wide range of subjects which have included matters raised in the commission's May 1988 report on the national museums.

Yorkshire (Administration)

69. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Yorkshire Arts Association to discuss the structure of arts administration in Yorkshire.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairman of the Yorkshire Arts Association from time to time. A variety of matters is discussed.

New Audiences

70. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how he intends to encourage new audiences for the arts.

Mr. Luce: I am encouraging a wide range of initiatives to attract new audiences to the arts through the Arts Council and other bodies. These include work on ethnic arts, rural arts and education, arts for the disabled, broadcasting and touring.

Wales (Funding)

71. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council to discuss the level of arts funding in Wales.

81. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council to discuss the level of arts funding in Wales.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council from time to time. A variety of matters are discussed.

Museums and Libraries

72. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the staffing levels at museums and libraries in London.

Mr Luce: In London, there are some 4,000 staff in public libraries for which information is available, and some 7,000 in national museums and galleries and the British library. Information on other London libraries and museums is not held centrally.

Film and Television (Support)

73. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what support for the British Film Institute and the National Film and Television School has been achieved in the last 10 years both from Government and private sources.

Mr. Luce: In the last 10 years the British Film Institute has received £83·6 million in Government support and £67·9 million from the private sector. In the same period, the National Film and Television school has received £10·7 million and £9·3 million respectively, from the same two sources.

Wales (Administration)

74. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council to discuss the structure of arts administration in Wales.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council from time to time. A variety of matters are discussed.

Performing Arts (Support)

75. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Minister for the Arts to what extent Government support for the performing arts has increased in real terms since 1979-80.

Mr. Luce: The Government's grant to the Arts Council, which is responsible for funding the performing arts and other art forms, has increased by 13 per cent. in real terms between 1979-80 and 1989-90.

Book-lending Service

76. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received on the continued provision of the basic book-lending service of libraries free of charge.

Mr. Luce: As I said in my statement on 8 February, at columns 987-97, the principle of a free basic public library service was generally supported by those responding to the library Green Paper. The Government have protected the essential elements of that service in the Local Government and Housing Bill.

Acceptances in Lieu of Tax

77. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the acceptances in lieu of tax in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The following items and land were accepted in lieu of tax in 1988-89:

Item	*To whom allocated*	*Amount of tax satisfied* £
Two paintings by William Hogarth	National Museum of Wales	[1]1,250,000
Flower painting by Jacob Marrel	Not yet allocated	61,369
Print by William Blake	Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge	19,658
Sculpture by Naum Gabo	Not yet allocated	286,610
"A Tartar Huntsman" by Rubens	Not yet allocated	50,000
"The Artist's Studio" by Peter Tillemans	Castle Museum, Norwich	52,270
"Allee a Chantilly" by Cezanne	Not yet allocated	[1]3,387,556
Land at Oxey Mead, Yarnton, Oxfordshire	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust Ltd.	15,640
Two busts by Roubiliac	National Museum of Scotland to remain in situ at Mellerstain House	353,855
Two portraits by Angelica Kauffman	Scottish National Portrait Gallery	34,100
Ten letters written to Sir Arthur Bryant	Imperial War Museum	875
Ten portraits	Not yet allocated	260,717
"Fabula" by El Greco	National Galleries of Scotland	[1]947,136·88

[1] These three items were met by a call on the reserve.

Foreign Artists (Grants)

78. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his policy on the allocation of grants by regional arts associations to foreign artists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The great bulk of spending by regional arts associations is in support of British artists. RAAs and their clients are, however, free to support foreign artists if they consider that this will add to the cultural richness of their regions.

Marketing

79. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how he is encouraging marketing of the arts.

Mr. Luce: As I announced to the House on 21 March, at column 509, I am building on marketing initiatives introduced over the last two years by now offering to support extended consultancies to arts organisations trying a new marketing approach, and the work of arts marketing consortia.

These initiatives, which will be run on my behalf by the Arts Council, are aimed at improving access to the arts and building up new and wider audiences.

Public Libraries

80. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many public libraries have *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened during the past 10 years.

Mr. Luce: These details are not kept centrally, but the total number of service points has increased from 13,339 to 18,567.

85. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many new public libraries have opened in the west midlands in the last 10 years.

Mr. Luce: This information is not kept centrally.

Dockland

82. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what plans he has to widen access to the arts in Docklands.

Mr. Luce: This is a matter for the Greater London Arts Association which, I understand, is engaged in continuing discussions with the London Docklands Development Corporation about a plan for arts and recreation in Docklands.

Business Sponsorship Scheme

84. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how much funding has been attracted through the business sponsorship incentive scheme since its inception; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: Since its inception in 1984 the business sponsorship incentive scheme has brought £17·23 million in business sponsorship and £7·59 million in Government awards to the arts; a total of £24·82 million new money.

Over 1,000 first-time sponsors have now been brought into the arts by the scheme and I am delighted with its progress.

Merseyside Arts Association

86. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Merseyside Arts Association to discuss the structure of arts administration on Merseyside.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairman of the Merseyside Arts Association from time to time. A variety of matters are discussed.

Arts Management

87. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Minister for the Arts to what extent local business communities can help support and enhance the quality of arts management.

Mr. Luce: I believe that great opportunities exist for local businesses to encourage arts management. This was the reason behind the business in the arts scheme launched by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts last year, with my support.

The three strands of the scheme provide for advice tailored to the needs of arts organisations (through the enterprise agency network), management training and placing business volunteers within arts bodies.

Urban Areas

88. **Mr. French:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on his policy on the role of the arts in the regeneration of urban areas.

Mr. Luce: I believe that the arts have an important role to play in urban renewal. The Arts Council's "Urban Renaissance" campaign has drawn attention to some of the possibilities, and I have personally visited a variety of excellent arts projects in inner cities.

Geological Museum

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the representations to Her Majesty's Government from the Geologists Association concerning the future of the geological museum.

Mr. Luce: I have not received any representation from the Geologists Association concerning the future of the geological museum.

I understand that an officer of the association has written to the director of the British museum (natural history), of which the geological museum forms a part, and that he will be replying shortly.

EMPLOYMENT

Rating Reform

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether young people over the age of 18 years who are on employment training or a similar scheme will have their income adjusted to take account of their obligation to pay the community charge from April 1989 in Scotland and from April 1990 in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: There is nothing I can add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 18 April 1989, at column *149*.

Petrol Prices

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what contribution the rises in petrol prices have made to the retail prices index since January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Between January and March 1989 the retail prices index for all items increased by 1·2 per cent. The rise in petrol prices over this period contributed approximately one tenth of one percentage point to this increase.

Palace of Westminster (Health and Safety)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when was the last Health and Safety Executive visit to the Palace of Westminster; and what was the outcome of the visit.

Mr. Nicholls: The last Health and Safety Executive visit to the Palace of Westminster was on 27 July 1988 to discuss and confirm arrangements for health and safety inspection at the Palace and other premises forming the parliamentary estate.

Siemens Printer

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many Siemens ND 3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Cope: No Siemens ND 3 printers are used by the Employment Department.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many instances have been detected in his Department of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* Trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether perpetrated by authorised or unauthorised users of computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded.

Mr. Cope: It is not the policy of the Employment Department to make public details of computer security incidents since such information would be of assistance to potential attackers.

Regarding other types of computer misuse, there have been eight instances of fraud since 1981 by authorised users of systems involving falsification of input information, as instanced in the National Audit Office report on "Computer Security in Government Departments" (October 1987).

Specialist advice was sought and has been acted upon on how best to prevent this in future.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department advises small businesses on ways of guarding against unauthorised internal or external penetration of computer files by hackers.

Mr. Cope: The Government's small firms service, now run by the Training Agency, advises small firms on a wide range of business problems. Where detailed knowledge is required, inquirers are referred to specialists.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the security of the computer systems that calculate the value of the retail prices index.

Mr. Cope: Safeguards are incorporated into the retail prices index computer system both to prevent unauthorised access and to secure the system against computer hardware failure.

Dock Workers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the average weekly earnings for the last four years of dock workers in *(a)* the Netherlands, *(b)* West Germany, *(c)* France, *(d)* Denmark, *(e)* Sweden, *(f)* Italy and *(g)* Spain.

Mr. Nicholls: Comparable data in the form requested are not readily available.

Publicity (Expenditure)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the estimated expenditure by his Department and the Training Agency, respectively, in 1989-90 on publicity on the same basis as used in his answer of 19 April to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras about the estimated expenditure for 1988-89.

Mr. Cope: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) to his previous question, on 10 April 1989.

The planned expenditure by my Department on general publicity in 1989-90, to include that for the Training Agency, remains as stated in table 7.29 on page 25 of the public expenditure White Paper, Cm. 607, published in January 1989. No further detailed information is yet available.

Tourism

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employmemt when he expects the review of the tourism policy to be completed.

Mr. Lee: The review report is currently being considered. The results of the review will be announced in due course.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the findings of the review body on tourism immediately on completion and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 19 January this year at column *284*.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will now resume payment of section 4 assistance.

Mr. Lee: No. The section 4 scheme is being considered as part of the review of Government tourism policy. An announcement about the future of the scheme will be made in due course.

Wages Councils

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report* those organisations and individuals responding to the wages councils consultative document whose responses were deemed to be for abolition, against abolition, or inconclusive according to the table in his reply to the hon. Member for Mid Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 21 March, *Official Report*, column *556*.

Mr. Nicholls: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 23 March, at columns *798-802*, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). This listed the organisations which responded. It is not this Department's practice to reveal the names of individuals who respond or the content of submissions made by either individuals or organisations.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what materials are provided by his Department to inform people covered by wages councils of their legal entitlements; and what plans he has to improve these materials and their availabilty.

Mr. Nicholls: Information on statutory minimum rates set by wages councils is published in the form of notices which are simple to understand and give details of where further information and advice can be obtained. Notices are sent to every employer known to be affected and the law requires employers to display copies where they can be read by all workers affected and to send a copy to each home worker. Where appropriate the notices are printed in up to eight languages as well as English. There are no plans at present to change the style, content or availability of the notices.

ACAS

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to receive the annual report of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

Mr. Fowler: I have received the ACAS report for 1988, which will be laid before both Houses of Parliament tomorrow. The report is also to be published tomorrow and copies will then be available from the Vote Office.

Safety-related Software

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what progress is being made by the Health and Safety Executive in the establishment of a formal framework on safety-related software; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The Health and Safety Executive is currently undertaking a study with the aim of developing a design and assessment framwork for safety-related computer software. It is due to be completed in June 1989, when it is intended the proposals will be published, to allow wider commentary before being finalised.

TRANSPORT

Automatic Ticket Barriers

9. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been spent by London Regional Transport on installing the new automatic barriers at London Underground stations.

Mr. Portillo: To date London Underground Limited has spent some £18 million on installing automatic ticket barriers.

Aviation Liberalisation

14. **Mr. Dicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will identify the increases in service and cuts in fares that have occurred as a result of the European aviation liberalisation package agreed in December 1987.

Mr. Channon: The European Commission has not yet produced a report on the overall effect of the package, but I am glad to say that we have designated airlines on new routes from London to Arrecife, Mahon, Ibiza, Treviso and Palermo, and second airlines on routes from London to Madrid, Athens, Rome and Milan. Air Europe has reduced fares from London to Paris, Munich, Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm by between 12 and 16 per cent.; and many airlines have cut fares for leisure travel.

Local Authority Roads (Report)

15. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations contained in the Audit Commission report, "Improving the Condition of Local Authority Roads."

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The main action is for local authorities. We have encouraged implementation through discussion with the local authority associations. We are discussing with them the recommendations for changes in legislation.

Airport Safety

17. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on recent developments in international co-operation on airport safety matters.

Mr. Channon: There is continuing international co-operation on developments in airport safety and the CAA ensures that licensed airports conform with ICAO standards.

Urban Traffic Control System, London

18. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much the urban traffic control system in London reduces delays at signals.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By an estimated 25 per cent. over the whole network.

Road Assessment Studies (London)

19. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost to date of stage 1 and stage 2 of the London assessment studies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The total cost of stage 1 of the studies was about £3 million. It is estimated that stage 2 will cost £4 million to complete. In comparison, personal injury accidents on roads in the east London assessment study area alone cost some £50 million each year.

54. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many houses in London have been blighted as a result of the publication, by him of stage 2a of the London assessment studies; and whether he will accept blight notices on these.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Blight provisions do not apply to the options published by the consultants carrying out the London assessment studies.

56. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for public consultation on stage 2 of the London assessment studies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We shall decide the arrangements for public comment on the options nearer the time the consultants' reports are available.

28. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the timetable for decisions on the south London road assessment studies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Some of the correspondents on the assessment studies have inquired at various times about the likely timing of decisions. They have been assured that we will try to end the uncertainty caused by rumour and speculation about the outcome as soon as possible.

Road and Rail Investment

21. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now review the criteria by which his Department assesses costs and benefits of road and rail investment proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: Broadly comparable criteria are used for appraising investment in roads and railways. They take account of the different ways in which each mode is financed and operated, the main difference being that benefits to rail users can be recovered through fares. Our views were set out last year in the Government's response to the Transport Committee's report on the financing of rail services, and in our recent statement on transport in London.

London (Traffic Flow)

22. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve traffic flow on the main routes into London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Traffic flows on the network will benefit from our support to a range of traffic management measures throughout London, including advanced and responsive urban traffic control systems and more effective control of parking and from our promotion of safe, efficient and attractive public transport services.

We are helping to improve the flow of traffic on the strategic London road network through the national trunk road programme in London and small improvement schemes.

We are providing financial support to appropriate borough road schemes and have issued a traffic management guidance circular to the boroughs.

Manchester Airport

23. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will report the progress that has been made concerning negotiations on air service agreements applying to Manchester airport.

Mr. Channon: The aviation measures adopted in the EC last year created opportunities for routes to be established between United Kingdom regional airports and the continent. New opportunities have recently been won for services between Manchester and Hong Kong and Malaysia and Pakistan. We are at present negotiating for further Manchester routes with the United States and Singapore.

Road Traffic Accidents

24. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the trends in deaths caused by road traffic accidents.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Downwards. Deaths in road accidents reached a post-war peak of 7,985 in 1966. They have fallen steadily since then, to 6,614 in 1977 and to 5,125 in 1987. The estimated number of road deaths in 1988 was 5,041.

Airline Security

25. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to meet the chairman of the BAA to discuss airline security.

Mr. Channon: I have no plans to do so at the moment, but I expect very shortly to receive from the chairman the progress report mentioned in the reply given to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) on 31 January, at column *146*. I will then consider whether a further meeting with the chairman would be desirable.

British Rail

30. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans next to meet the chair of British Rail; and what subjects he plans to discuss.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend plans next to meet the chairman of British Rail on 17 May to discuss a variety of railway matters.

51. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next proposes to meet the chairman of British Rail; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) earlier today.

61. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail; and what was discussed.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of British Rail on 19 April when they discussed a variety of railway matters.

Lorry Wheels

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if his Department intends to make new recommendations on the manufacture or maintenance of the systems for securing lorry wheels to axles in the light of the fatal accident at Rogerstone, Newport, Gwent on 7 April 1988;

(2) if any investigation was undertaken into the safety of lorry wheels following the fatal accident at Rogerstone, Newport, Gwent on 7 April 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department takes a continuing interest in the safety of lorry wheels through the setting of regulations, certification of vehicle components, annual testing and spot-checks. It is currently involved in consideration being given by the BSI to the recent reports by the Motor Industry Research Association, in order to see if changes are required in the current British Standard and regulations.

The importance of good maintenance standards is regularly discussed with the freight industry. Vehicles are banned or operators' licences withdrawn where maintenance is unsatisfactory. Last year 77,937 roadside spot-checks were carried out on heavy goods vehicles—36 per cent. up on the previous year.

Mr. Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will set out the information his Department has collected on accidents in the past three years that have been caused by wheels becoming detached from lorries and other large vehicles;

(2) if there has been any increase detected by his Department in the number of accidents involving wheels becoming detached from lorries.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The following numbers of incidents involving wheel detachments have been reported to the Vehicle Inspectorate in the last three years:

	Number
1986	37
1987	41
1988	30

Bypasses

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy with regard to providing additional funds for the construction of bypasses around important towns on trunk roads; if he will consider assistance to Essex county council for such a bypass around Ongar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are some 140 bypasses in the trunk road programme. These contribute to the Government's objectives for the programme, which include the improvement of the environment by removing through traffic from unsuitable roads in towns and villages.

Ongar is served by local roads. Transport supplementary grant is available to help fund local highway authorities' programmes of capital expenditure on these roads. In determining how much of an authority's expenditure to accept for TSG, the Secretary of State considers the extent to which the roads concerned are of more than local importance, the extent to which the people working or living in the authority's area would be relieved of the effects of heavy through traffic, and the merits of competing bids for limited resources.

If Essex county council includes proposals for an Ongar bypass in its annual transport policies and programme submission, my right hon. Friend will be pleased to consider them.

M25

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the lengths of the M25 for which his Department gave assurances, or made public statements, at public inquiries or elsewhere, that they would not be lit, *(b)* the lengths in miles and the standard of the motorway affected and *(c)* for which of these sections lighting is now being planned.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No undertakings were given at public inquiries that sections of the M25 would not be lit at some future date, but undertakings were given that the following three sections would not be lit at the outset:

The section between junctions 3 and 5, Swanley to Sevenoaks, 8·6 miles dual 3 lane;

the section between junctions 8 and 10, Reigate—Leatherhead—Wisley, 13·3 miles dual 3 lane; and

the section between junctions 18 and 19 at Chorleywood 3·1 miles dual 3 lane.

The section between junctions 18 and 19 at Chorleywood may have lighting installed this year. The need for lighting on remaining unlit sections is being considered as part of the M25 review currently in progress.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those lengths of the M25 and adjacent motorway sections on which there are sensors to measure average traffic speed and detect incidents and unstable flow; how far apart the sensors are located; whether they are placed in all lanes; for which sections they can give an indication of average speed, and average hourly flow per lane; and if he will give the current average peak-hour and off-peak speed, for all lanes averaged, for those sections so monitored.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The equipment currently in operation measures traffic flows. It does not measure average traffic speeds (which are surveyed separately) or detect incidents or unstable flow. An incident detection system is soon to be commissioned on the approach to and within the Holmesdale and Bell Common tunnels. This will use sensors at 500 m intervals, with a threshold alarm, to warn the police of slow moving traffic queues. The need for wider use of automatic incident detection equipment is being considered in the review of the motorway.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of the M25 can, in practice, be observed by a closed-circuit television camera for incident verification, and guidance to emergency services when an incident is being handled on the motorway; what M25 interchanges are currently covered by closed-circuit television; and how many miles of the M25 main carriageways can be observed by these cameras.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Closed-circuit television (CCTV) is being provided on M25 in accordance with a

departmental standard which defines the "Criteria for the provision of CCTV on motorways". At present CCTV coverage is available to the police at the Homesdale and Bell Common tunnels and at junctions 15, 20 to 23, 25 to 27. Contracts have been let which will progressively extend this CCTV coverage to almost all M25 junctions by the summer of 1990.

The carriageway mileage which can be observed by the cameras cannot be quoted since their range varies at each individual location depending upon physical positioning, geographical topography and the weather at any given time.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average response time between an incident occurring on the M25 and *(a)* its identification and *(b)* a rescue or breakdown truck reaching the incident, where the vehicles immobilised are blocking one or more lanes of a carriageway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This information is not available. Incidents are mainly reported to, or identified by the police via the emergency telephone system, vehicle patrols and the use of closed circuit television at some locations. Response times vary according to the time of day, location and nature of the incident.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, on the existing dual-four lane sections of the M25 between the A30 and the M4, the outermost lane acts as part of the means of carrying through traffic, or as a merge and diverge facility for traffic using the adjacent junctions to this section of the motorway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The nearside lanes are signed for use by traffic joining or leaving the motorway at the junctions.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many directional miles of the M25 have specially constructed noise or visual mounds alongside the hard shoulder to mitigate the impact of the motorway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are about 32 miles of specially constructed noise bunds and barriers along the M25.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the average five-day and seven-day traffic flows for both 16-hour and 24-hour days for each section of the M25, and for the Dartford tunnel and approach roads, for *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* the latest available year, indicating the month of the count in each case.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The requested information is as follows:

Estimates of M25 annual average flows: 1986 and 1987
All motor vehicles: thousands

	1986				1987			
Link	*Month of count*	*7 day/24 hour*	*5 day/24 hour*	*5 day/16 hour*	*Month of count*	*7 day/24 hour*	*5 day/24 hour*	*5 day/16 hour*
1A-1B	6	62	64	61	4	75	80	75
1B-2	6	69	71	67	5	81	83	78
2-3	6	60	66	62	4	70	76	71
3-4	6	48	53	50	4	55	60	57
4-5	6	56	61	58	4	60	65	61
5-6	6	72	78	74	10	76	81	77
6-7	6	79	85	81	10	83	86	81
7-8	6	85	92	87	4	94	100	95
8-9	6	77	83	78	5	84	92	87
9-10	6	77	83	78	5	88	94	88
10-11	6	96	105	99	9	107	113	107
11-12	6	111	1211	114	10	119	126	119
12-13	6	110	119	112	5	121	131	123
13-14	6	112	121	115	5	131	139	131
14-15	6	99	107	101	7	123	129	121
15-16	6	90	97	92	4	119	129	122
16-17	5	79	85	80	5	105	112	106
17-18	6	79	86	82	4	108	115	109
18-19	6	80	87	82	4	114	121	114
19-20	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4	95	103	98
20-21	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4	97	106	100
21-22	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4	79	87	82
22-23	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4	89	95	90
23-24	6	56	62	58	5	93	102	96
24-25	6	60	66	62	5	87	95	90
25-26	5	66	71	67	5	84	90	85
26-27	n.a.	64	69	65	n.a.	80	n.a.	n.a.
27-28	6	69	76	71	4	88	94	89
28-29	6	62	69	65	5	74	79	74
29-30	n.a.	66	69	57	5	68	75	70
30-31	6	48	53	49	5	61	66	62
31-01	9	68	72	68	5	75	n.a.	n.a.

Note: Estimates of average daily flow are not corrected for seasonal effects, so the figures given above are influenced by the month of count. Estimates for 1988 are not yet available.
n.a. Data not available.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the latest available average daily, average weekday, average morning peak-hour and average evening peak-hour traffic flow entering the M25 at each of the entrance slip roads from other roads or motorways;

(2) if he will list the latest available average daily, average weekday, average morning peak-hour and average evening peak-hour traffic flow leaving the M25 at each of its exit slip roads to other roads or motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Our consultants conducting the M25 review are obtaining figures of traffic entering or leaving the M25 at each junction to show the average daily Monday-Thursday flow, and the average morning and evening peak flows. These will be available in due course.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many patrolling breakdown and rescue trucks are in service on the M25 during normal weekday commuting and working hours *(a)* on the motorway as a whole and *(b)* per each 20 directional miles; and who funds and directs the operation and placing of these vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Dedicated recovery vehicles do not patrol the M25. Recovery vehicles are stationed at major roadworks to deal with accidents and breakdowns within those works. They are also stationed at the Dartford tunnel. Elsewhere, recovery vehicles are summoned by the police, who select them in rotation from a list of local garages. Alternatively, drivers may elect to use their own recovery organisation. Vehicle owners pay for recovery except within major roadworks where the Department provides the service.

We are examining the present arrangements, in consultation with the police and the Department's agent authorities, with the aim of reducing the times for which carriageways are obstructed by accidents and other incidents.

M40

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the exact tender arrangements for the M40 extension from Wendlebury to Waterstock.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have today invited competitive tenders from civil engineering contractors for the construction of the final section of the M40 extension between Waterstock and Wendlebury. Firms have been asked to submit tenders within six weeks based on their own choice of construction period. We will be offering the successful contractor a bonus for finishing ahead of schedule with financial penalties if completion is delayed.

Mersey Tunnels

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill, he will now explain how any waiving of interest payments with respect to the Mersey tunnels would be authorised and financed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: If the Merseyside passenger transport authority provides the Secretary of State with proposals for putting the tunnels on a sound financial footing which show that Government assistance through the waiving of interest payments is justified, we shall consider with it how that can best be done.

Roads (South-East)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to obtain a copy of the recent report by the Society of County Surveyors about the case for roads improvement in the south-east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have read with interest the recent report by the County Surveyors' Society entitled "Review of Highway Investment Needs up to the year 2001 on Motorways, Primary and Strategic Routes in England (excluding London)".

We shall consider the views of the society on national roads in the review of the trunk road programme which we are currently undertaking.

We have recently invited all local highway authorities to submit bids by 31 July for transport supplementary grant for 1990-91 for local roads of more than local importance. In considering their bids, the local highway authorities may also find the report of some assistance.

The new system of credit approvals rather than capital allocations should direct more resources towards local roads capital spending.

We agree with the basic message from the county surveyors that increased spending on roads will benefit the economy, reduce casualties and improve the environment.

Aviation Security

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is ready to report the outcome of his review of aviation security; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The purpose of aviation security is to protect passengers and aircrew from attacks by terrorists and other criminals. At the same time every effort has to be made to facilitate the smooth operation of airports and air services. I have to judge this in the light of the changing threat to civil aviation and of security incidents such as hijacks and sabotage. The Lockerbie disaster marked a trend for terrorist bomb attacks on airliners to become increasingly severe. Even tighter security measures are necessary even if this is at the expense of some cost and inconvenience to passengers.

My aviation security review is a continuing one. I have already discussed progress on it with the Transport Select Committee. The Committee's report on its current inquiry into airport security will be of further help to me as my review goes forward.

Immediately after Lockerbie increased security measures were ordered for United States airlines, particularly for hold baggage. I attended an emergency meeting of the National Aviation Security Committee on 5 January in the light of which I decided to bring in further measures for United States airlines in relation to cabin baggage, hold baggage and cargo. I ordered new rules for the issue and use of passes at all United Kingdom airports and on 6 April I announced the introduction of a package of measures for all our major airports that should provide better security for restricted areas and for aircraft, passengers and baggage in those areas.

I have now set firm objectives for a further tightening of security. They are:

(1) closer examination of the items taken on board aircraft, such as radios and computers, which might be used to conceal explosive devices;
(2) screening all hold baggage on flights at higher risk;
(3) further tightening of the security requirements for cargo, mail and courier consignments;

(4) tighter requirements for the physical separation of inbound and outbound passengers. (This may require structural alterations, or equivalent safeguards, at some airports.);

(5) changes to the design and construction of aircraft interiors to make it harder to hide weapons or explosives in them, and to make them easier to search.

Achieving these objectives will take time. They require careful co-ordination, more staff, more equipment, further training and close co-operation with our aviation industry and with other likeminded countries.

It is not enough to lay down security requirements; we must check that airports and airlines carry them out. I now intend to more than double the strength of the aviation security division. My team of aviation security advisers made 190 visits to airports last year. They will now be able to carry out more inspections and spot checks, as well as special surveys to determine whether new measures are needed. To emphasise their monitoring role they will be reconstituted as the Aviation Security Inspectorate. Each of the 20 or so larger airports will be visited frequently, and will be inspected formally and comprehensively at least once a year. Other airports will be formally inspected at regular intervals. Inspectors will also make overseas visits to ascertain that the security afforded to British airlines is satisfactory. They will be involved, as the advisers are now, in advising on the appropriate measures to counter the threat, in the development of new security measures and policies, and in the day-to-day response to security questions as they arise.

Under the Aviation Security Act 1982 I have certain powers to direct airport managers and aircraft operators for the purpose of protecting aircraft, airports and air navigation facilities from acts of violence. My aviation security advisers have the power to enter and inspect aircraft, and to detain them if necessary for that purpose, or enter and inspect any building or part of an airport.

But there are certain areas where my powers are more limited than I should like. I shall therefore seek new powers from Parliament to secure more effective implementation of security measures.

Over the last two years my Department has put together a clearly defined programme to carry out research and development into aviation security equipment. It has made arrangements with the Home Office's scientific research and development branch and the Ministry of Defence's Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment to develop new detection techniques, and to conduct trials of commercial equipment for airport use. The budget for this work is about half a million pounds a year.

I now want this work stepped up, and I am doubling the budget for the current financial year. The research establishments will bring in extra staff and the work will be co-ordinated by a full-time project officer—a scientist—in the aviation security division of my Department. The projects will include the continuing examination of commercially available equipment for explosives detection, to assess the suitability of the new generation of advanced X-rays and explosive vapour detectors and other systems in this field. We shall also sponsor work on new techniques for the bulk detection of explosives in baggage and cargo.

We are keenly interested in the thermal neutron analysis (TNA) machines now being developed in the USA and in the United Kingdom for detecting explosives in baggage. The American project is sponsored by the FAA, and we have now received its formal proposal to install one of the six production machines at Gatwick or Heathrow later this year. We are examining the practical considerations with BAA and expect very soon to be able to reply favourably to the FAA proposal.

In this country work is being carried out under a contract between the Atomic Energy Authority's Harwell laboratory and a private company. We have kept in touch with progress on this project and are discussing with its sponsors the possibility of funding further work.

But it is too soon to know whether TNA can by itself solve all the problems of screening baggage and we must continue to look for additional techniques.

Aviation security is a matter of international concern. The standards and recommended practices which govern aviation security are set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). It is important that security worldwide should be co-ordinated so that it is everywhere in line with the threat to civil aviation.

In February I attended a special ministerial meeting held by the Council of ICAO to discuss the implications of the Lockerbie disaster. I reported the successful outcome of this meeting to the House on 21 February. An ambitious programme of work began at ICAO designed to improve security standards worldwide. A meeting of the ICAO aviation security panel has been convened for May to take matters forward. Meanwhile, I look forward to a further discussion with United States Secretary of Transportation Skinner when he visits London later this week.

My aim is to introduce sound and practical measures that give a high level of security but interfere as little as possible with the operation of our airports and airlines and so with the travelling public. Such measures need careful preparation in close consultation with the industry and others. I am determined to press ahead with this work so as to achieve worthwhile and lasting improvements to aviation security in this country.

36. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what date he expects the full availability of thermal neutron analysis machines for airport security at British airports.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend today to the hon. Member for Welwyn, Hatfield (Mr. Evans) and to the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith).

45. **Mr. Prescott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many security breaches have occurred at British airports since 21 December 1988; how many reviews of security he has called for since then; and what action he is now taking to improve security.

Mr. Channon: Fourteen security incidents have been notified to the Department. Nine of these involved breaches of varying degrees of seriousness in the requirements of the aviation security programme. Two other cases are still under investigation. On the latter parts of the question I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Welwyn, Hatfield (Mr. Evans) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith).

Fishing Vessel Laurel (Incident)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has concerning an incident

at 8.45 am on Monday 17 April involving the fishing vessel Laurel and a submarine in the Irish sea; what action he has taken; what investigations will be undertaken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* My Department received a report on 17 April that the Isle of Man registered fishing vessel Laurel had been towed backwards. The vessel was subsequently forced to cut her nets for safety, resulting in the loss of her fishing gear. She then returned to Peel. The incident would appear to have involved a United States Navy submarine which was operating in the area at the time and which, on surfacing, was found to have sustained superficial damage. It is understood that the United States authorities are conducting an investigation into the incident.

The Laurel was outside territorial waters at the time and in such circumstances it is not normal practice for my Department to hold an investigation. The Isle of Man marine administration is inquiring into the incident.

High-Speed Rail Line

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) further to his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling on 17 March, *Official Report*, columns *371-72*, whether, if the present year is the first year of operation of the high-speed line for the purposes of the net present value calculation referred to, the full construction costs, including the interest on construction finance, will be compounded forward to the first year of operation; and with what compounding factor;

(2) further to his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling on 17 March, *Official Report*, columns *371-72*, whether for the purposes of the net present value calculation referred to, the present year will be taken as the first year of construction or the first year of operation of the high-speed line.

Mr. Portillo *[holding replies 20 April 1989]:* There is no strict rule about which year is taken as the year to which the costs and benefits of a proposed project are discounted. However, it is common practice to discount to the year in which the project is appraised (the decision year). The choice of year to be taken as the "present" year for purposes of the NPV calculation does not affect the assessment of the project's viability. If the first year of operation is taken instead of the decision year, the NPV of the construction costs will be higher, since they will have been compounded forward, but the NPV of the revenues will also be higher, since they will not have been discounted back for so many years. If the NPV is positive when discounted to one particular year, then, using the same discount rate, it will also be positive when discounted (or compounded) to any other year. The compound rate used would be the same as the discount rate to be applied to the project (and described in previous answers to my right hon. Friend). Interest charges would not be included, since the discount (or compound) rate is used to measure the cost of capital resources instead of the interest rate; to include both would be double counting.

London (Transport Studies)

31. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many studies into aspects of transport in London his Department is currently sponsoring; and at what cost to public funds.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department is currently sponsoring nine studies into aspects of transport in London. They are:

Study	*Cost* £
Stage 2 of the four London assessment studies	4,000,000
Central London rail study (jointly with BR and LRT)	[1]400,000
East London rail study (jointly with DoE and LRT)	170,000
A4/M4 corridor study	200,000
Trunk road signing review	470,000
Development of traffic management and accident prevention measures	1,700,000
Company assisted travel	125,000
Heathrow and south west London orbital movement study (HASQUAD)	500,000
Tourist coaches in London	168,000

[1] Approximately.

Some of the studies require the use of the London transportation survey model. The total costs of the development, maintenance and use of this model between April 1986 and February 1989 was £2,300,000.

A59 Corridor

32. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the consultants' report on the A59 corridor involving Ormskirk, Southport and Preston.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The findings of the consultants' review are being considered in the context of the current review of the trunk road programme.

We hope to make an announcement in early summer.

Network SouthEast

33. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss investment in Network SouthEast.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend will next meet the chairman on 17 May to discuss a wide range of railway issues.

Waterloo-Southampton Rail Service (Derailment)

37. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what report he has received from his inspector into the cause of the derailment of the 10.36 am train from Waterloo to Southampton on Thursday 6 April; what steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence of this accident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that British Rail's internal inquiry into this derailment has taken place. Once I have received a copy of the inquiry report, I shall decide, upon the advice of the railway inspectorate, whether any action is required.

Car Mileage (Recordings)

38. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate, using United States' experience, the cost of recording car mileages through the driver and vehicle licensing centre.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The annual cost of recording car mileages at the driver and vehicle licensing centre is estimated to be in excess of £3 million, in addition to the costs of setting up such a system. No comparison with the United States' experience can be made given the diversity of licensing and registration procedures applicable in individual states. The problems are accuracy and effectiveness as well as cost.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King).

50. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why he has refused to introduce a system of mileage logging when vehicle excise licences are renewed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government's reasons for not doing so are set out in my letter of 16 March to the Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Gordon Borrie. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Roads and Motoring (Expenditure)

40. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the level of public expenditure on roads and motoring during the last year for which information is available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Gross public expenditure on roads and activities related to motor vehicles and motoring in Great Britain in 1988-89 is presently forecast to be £4,450 million. This figure does not include police expenditure on traffic regulation.

Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles

41. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to publish his proposals relating to taxis and private hire vehicles.

Mr. Portillo: No date has been fixed.

Manchester Airport

42. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement about rail links to Manchester airport.

Mr. Portillo: Last month my officials met officials of the relevant parties to discuss outstanding issues associated with the proposed rail link. Encouraging and substantial progress has been made. I now await a formal investment submission from the British Railways Board.

Road Accidents

43. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many deaths and serious injuries occurred on United Kingdom roads in 1987, and each of the previous five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The figures required, on how many deaths and serious injuries occurred on United Kingdom roads in 1987, and each of the previous five years, are shown in the table.

Road casualties in the United Kingdom: 1982-87

	Killed	*Seriously injured*	*All killed or seriously injured*
1982	6,150	82,242	88,392
1983	5,618	72,923	78,541
1984	5,788	75,524	81,312
1985	5,342	72,128	77,470
1986	5,618	70,577	76,195
1987	5,339	66,178	71,517

Provisional figures for 1988 for Great Britain indicate that there were 5,050 deaths in road accidents, a fall of 2 per cent. compared with 1987.

Tunnels (Safety Standards)

44. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met representatives of the emergency services to discuss safety standards in tunnels.

Mr. Portillo: There are regular meetings between the railway inspectorate, and the emergency services to discuss safety in railway tunnels.

Gatwick Airport (Runway)

46. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will open talks with BAA Ltd. to institute a study of the case for a second runway at Gatwick airport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority is due to provide my right hon. Friend in July with advice on airport capacity to 2005, including runway capacity for the London area. He will wish to consider the advice before responding to the recent Select Committee on Transport's recommendation that all efforts should be made to provide a second main runway at Gatwick.

Air Travellers (Delay)

47. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce delays to air travellers at British airports this summer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority set out the strategy of the national air traffic services for relieving congestion in 1989 and the years to 1995 in its advice "Strategies for Making Good Use of Airspace 1989-95". This was published last December and copies placed in the Library.

The United Kingdom is also working with other European countries in the International Civil Aviation Organisation and in Eurocontrol to improve co-operation and co-ordination between air traffic services. An improved air traffic flow management system was recently brought into operation in readiness for summer traffic levels.

Road Traffic Act

48. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to review the operation of the Road Traffic Act.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We regularly keep under review all factors that influence safety on Britain's roads,

including those matters required by law. Proposals for a major reform of road traffic legislation were published on 7 February in a White Paper, "The Road User and the Law" (Cm. 576).

Peterborough (Explosion)

49. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the report on the Peterborough explosion to be published; and if he will make a statement.

52. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the report on the Peterborough explosion to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A publication date for the report into the Peterborough explosion cannot be set until the investigations by the Health and Safety Executive have been completed.

Central London Rail Study

53. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much fares on LRT services and British Rail's Network SouthEast services would have to rise, in real terms, to pay for the major upgrading programme and the full cross package of proposals in the central London rail study.

Mr. Portillo: It is too early to say. Further work is currently being done on the financing of the central London rail study proposals.

P and O

55. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chair of P and O; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of P and O on 18 January 1989. He discussed a wide range of transport issues.

London Airports (Night Flights)

57. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the regulations governing night flights of jet aircraft from London's airports, particularly of those in the NNC category.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The present night restrictions at Heathrow and Gatwick were introduced in 1988 and apply for five years. My right hon. Friend, however, has undertaken to review the night noise climate at Gatwick after the current summer season. This could lead to an adjustment of quotas if it is apparent that disturbance under the new restrictions regime has become worse, rather than lessening as we expect.

East Anglia (Trunk Road Network)

58. **Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made on improvements to the trunk road network in East Anglia.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are 24 schemes costing more than £200 million at various stages of preparation in the current programme for improvement of the trunk road network in East Anglia. They are all scheduled for completion by 1995; many of them earlier. Good progress is being maintained.

Further possible improvements to trunk roads benefiting East Anglia are being considered in the current comprehensive review of the trunk road programme. We expect to make an announcement in the early summer.

Road Safety

59. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further measures he plans to bring forward to improve road safety.

60. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further measures he plans to bring forward to improve road safety.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We announced on 19 April at column *163* a series of new measures intended to reduce the unacceptably high casualty rate among pedestrians. I also announced on 18 April at column *106* decisions on a number of aspects of our earlier proposals for improving motorcycle safety. Our priority now will be to implement all these measures as soon as practicable.

We shall shortly bring before the House for approval regulations to implement the Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Rear Seat Belts by Children) Act 1988.

The main task is to help generate news and current affairs coverage of the 100 deaths each week and just over 6,000 injuries.

Traffic Congestion

62. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he intends to take to alleviate the present situation of drivers being stuck in road jams of (i) 26 miles and (ii) over 30 miles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We need more road capacity and roads which last longer, drivers who cause fewer crashes and better information systems to warn of incidents and congestion. Action is being taken in each case.

63. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the cost to the economy of delays and congestion on the roads of Britain during 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran).

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to his Department's computer files.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of his Department's policy on review of the security of its computer files.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department keeps all aspects of computer security under regular review. Arrangements are reviewed annually by the Departments information technology steering committee.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he can quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is not the policy of the Department to make public the scope for damage. Such information would be of assistance to potential attackers.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether staff are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration; and what plans exist to deal with penetration of particularly sensitive systems.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Security managers are responsible for staff education programmes and the development of contingency plans. Effectiveness would be reduced if details were made public.

Data Protection

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department has taken to protect data in transit by electronic means.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department takes advice from the appropriate Government authorities on security matters, including the Central Computing and Telecommunications Agency. To publish details of actual risks and countermeasures would itself constitute a breach of security.

Motorways

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Department's standard for motorways of more than dual-three lane width requires the motorway to be continuously lit.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department's standard allows motorways of more than dual-three lane width to be lit where appropriate.

Goods and Public Service Vehicles

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has now received the review of goods and public service vehicles operator licensing; when he intends to publish the review; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 21 March at column *530*.

Channel Tunnel

12. **Mr. Riddick** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the implications of the Channel tunnel for the Yorkshire area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I have received a number especially when I attended a conference in York on the Channel tunnel. I believe that it can benefit all parts of the United Kingdom, including Yorkshire.

20. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the date on which the Channel tunnel will open.

Mr. Portillo: Eurotunnel has recently announced a new target completion date of 15 June 1993.

26. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last discussed with British Rail routes for freight traffic from the Channel tunnel to the regions; and if he will make a statement.

29. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last discussed with British Rail routes for freight traffic from the Channel tunnel to the regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The routeing of Channel tunnel rail freight traffic is entirely a matter for British Rail. Its proposals for services to the regions will be set out in the plan it has to produce by the end of this year under section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act.

27. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to improve communications to the south-west of England so that the area can benefit from the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: Rail access between the south-west and the Channel tunnel is the responsibility of British Rail. It is required by section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act to publish a plan by the end of the year setting out its proposals for international passenger and freight services serving various parts of the country. It has not yet completed the regional consultations in preparation for this plan. Our national road planning takes into account the requirements of road traffic to and from the tunnel. A review of the trunk road programme is in progress, and we expect to make an announcement in the spring.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet Yorkshire regional managers of British Rail to discuss the implications for Yorkshire of the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: I meet British Rail's regional managers from time to time. They will, I am sure, contribute to BR's plan for Channel tunnel freight and passenger services, which British Rail is obliged to publish by the end of the year in compliance with section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will indicate the general line of route of his proposed new road from Southampton to the entrance of the Channel tunnel; and whether it will be a single or dual carriageway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no firm proposals. As part of our current review of the trunk road programme we are considering whether there should be a study of the need for additional capacity from the Channel tunnel and the M20 westwards to relieve existing roads. We hope to make an announcement about the outcome of the review by early summer.

34. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy not to approve proposals from British Rail for every passenger and all items of freight from and to the Channel tunnel to all destinations in the United Kingdom to pass through central London.

Mr. Portillo: BR's passenger and freight services through the Channel tunnel must operate on a commercial basis. Subject to that and to parliamentary approval for

new lines where needed, the routes used by British Rail for its passenger and freight traffic are the responsibility of the British Railways Board. They do not require Government approval.

39. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further representations he has received on the need for a direct link to the Channel tunnel for the north and Scotland.

Mr. Portillo: I have received some representations on the need for good communications between the Channel tunnel and the North and Scotland. There will be direct links from the tunnel into the United Kingdom road and rail networks. Out national roads planning takes account of the requirements of road traffic to and from the tunnel. Representations on rail are best made to the working groups which British Rail has set up in each region as part of its planning for international passenger and freight services.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 25 April 1989

EMPLOYMENT

Young Employees

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total cost to central Government funds of the community industry scheme in 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89; what was the cost per young employee; and how much each young employee was being paid on average in each year.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is given in the following tables:

Table 1
Community Industry Scheme—total costs to central Government funds in 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89

Year	Amount £
1986-87	25,011,000
1987-88	25,513,000
1988-89	25,203,000

Table 2
Community Industry Scheme—cost per young employee in 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89

Year	Amount £
1986-87	3,682
1987-88	3,870
1988-89	4,000

Table 3
Community Industry Scheme—average pay per young employee in 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89

Year	Amount £
1986-87	1,915·08
1987-88	1,819·65
1988-89	1,666·64

Notes:

1. In Tables 1-3 the figures for the year 1988-89 are estimated, as final year end information is not yet available.
2. The decrease in average pay per young employee in 1987-88 and 1988-89 reflects the scheme's success in attracting a greater number of 16 and 17-year-olds whose rates of pay are lower than those per 18 and 19-year-olds.

Community Options Programme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether employment training trainees who opt to take up voluntary work organised under the community options programme will be required *(a)* to sign on as unemployed and *(b)* to satisfy the availability for work condition; and whether they will continue to receive the £10 training premium.

Mr. Nicholls: People who choose to take up community opportunities after employment training, and who wish to claim unemployment benefit and/or income support, will be required to satisfy the appropriate legislation.

Participants on community opportunities are not trainees and so will not receive a training premium. Their travelling expenses will be met in full.

Community Industry Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to merge the community industry scheme with employment training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no plans to merge the community industry scheme with employment training.

Redundancy Notices

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to how many employees of *(a)* the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, *(b)* the community task force and *(c)* the Apex trust, supported by funds from the community programme or job training scheme, have been issued with redundancy notices during the transition from CP/JTS to ET; and how many have been issued with redundancy notices during the operation of ET to date.

Mr. Nicholls: Information is not available in the precise form requested.

The following figures are for employees declared redundant, within the meaning of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, during the transition from the community programme and the job training scheme to employment training and during the operation of employment training to date;

Organisation	Number of redundancies
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	250
Community Task Force	150
Apex Trust	7

Mines (Health and Safety)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the proposed amendments to the regulations on health and safety in the mines are intended to leave these matters within the discretion of management rather than subject to the authority of Her Majesty's inspectors.

Mr. Nicholls: No. Responsibility for health and safety continues to rest primarily with management. It is the duty of HSE's inspectors to ensure that the law is being observed and advise on working practices. Any new regulations proposed by the Health and Safety Commission will maintain or improve safety standards.

Regional Policy

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will reconsider his Department's regional employment policies in the light of the unemployment figures released by his Department on 13 April.

Mr. Lee: The policies of my Department are kept under continuous review in the light of changing circumstances.

The March unemployment figures published on 13 April showed that in all regions of the United Kingdom unemployment was at a lower level than in March 1988. Total United Kingdom unemployment has fallen to its lowest level for over eight years, and there are well over 26 million people in employment—the highest number ever.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are no Siemens ND3 printers in either the ODA or Diplomatic Service wings of the FCO.

El Salvador

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made, or plans to make, to the El Salvadorean Government concerning the case of Eliseo Cordova Aguilar, vice-president of the Salvadorean Institute of Social Security Co-operative, abducted by El Salvadorean authorities on 12 July 1988.

Mr. Waldegrave: We understand that Sr. Cordova Aguilar was sized by armed men in civilian clothing on 12 July 1988. He has not been seen since.

We have made no specific representations to the Government of El Salvador on this case. However, we have made plain the importance we attach to proper respect for human rights both to the present Government in El Salvador and to President-elect Cristiani, as well as in international fora, most recently at the UNCHR in February 1989.

We remain in close touch with human rights organisations and other interested bodies in El Salvador, and we shall continue to monitor the situation closely.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Aushad Iqbal is to be issued with a visa by the post in Islamabad to join his wife in the United Kingdom; when Mr. Iqbal's appeal, No. —TH/36030/87/6216 was upheld by the immigration appeal tribunal; and when the post was instructed to issue a visa to Mr. Iqbal.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information required is not immediately available and a further reply will be sent to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held on 24 April.

Mrs. Chalker: The Foreign Affairs Council met in Luxembourg on 24 April. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council agreed on the continuing need for a coherent and carefully differentiated policy towards the countries of eastern Europe.

With the regard to Romania, the Council agree on the suspension of negotiations for a trade and co-operation agreement. Their resumption would require clear evidence of a significant improvement in Romania's respect for human rights, and observance of its CSCE obligations. The United Kingdom strongly endorsed this unequivocal message of serious Community concern at the situation in Romania.

The Council also noted encouraging developments in the situation in Poland, and agreed that the Community should adopt a more flexible position in current negotiations for a trade and co-operation agreement. The United Kingdom strongly supports a positive Community approach to Poland, reflecting progress in the implementation of Polish economic and political reforms.

The Council also received reports on preliminary Commission discussions with the Soviet Union on a trade and co-operation agreement, and with the Gulf Co-operation Council on a second stage agreement.

Noting the concerns of some member states on textiles, the Council generally welcomed the results of the mid-term review of the Uruguay round, completed in Geneva earlier this month, which laid the foundations for substantive negotiations for the remainder of the round. The Council also noted progress in negotiations with the United Kingdom on the dispute over the EC's directive banning meat from animals reared with hormones.

An EC/Morocco Co-operation Council was held in the margins of the Council meeting.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Judges (East Anglia)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Attorney-General how many additional judges he has appointed in the East Anglian region; what additional court rooms and related resources and staff have been provided to support them; and at what cost.

The Attorney-General: In the period 1 January 1988 to 31 December 1988 the number of judges assigned to the Chelmsford courts administrator's group within the south eastern circuit increased by two. The salary of a circuit judge is £48,100. During the same period, a combined court centre was opened in Norwich, being a net addition of one courtroom at a cost of a little more than £7 million. There has been no change in the complement of staff.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

New Knitwear Machinery (Greece)

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action he is taking to seek to bring to an end the current payments of 50 per cent. grant in Greece on the purchase of new knitwear machinery in that country.

Mr. Alan Clark: I understand that assistance of this type would be permissible for investments in the Attica and border regions of Greece. Regional assistance is a legitimate form of assistance under article 93(2) of the

Treaty of Rome. Under certain circumstances, United Kingdom knitwear companies investing in particular areas of the United Kingdom could be eligible for similar support.

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Forth: There are no Siemens ND3 printers in use in my Department.

GATT

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress his Department has made in the recent GATT negotiations in Geneva; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 10 April at column *396*.

House of Fraser

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster under what section and subsections of the Companies Act he initiated his Department's inquiry into the affairs of the House of Fraser Holdings.

Mr. Maude: The inspectors were appointed to investigate the affairs of House of Fraser Holdings plc under the provisions of section 432(2) of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the inspectors who considered the report dated 15 July 1988 submitted by buyers acting for the House of Fraser considered that report prior to its presentation to Ministers on 23 July 1988.

Mr. Maude: The inspectors considered fully and carefully all information and evidence received by them before submitting their report to my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State.

Airtours

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he is satisfied that the interests of passengers are fully protected in travel schemes to the Caribbean offered by companies such as Airtours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Yes. Airlines operating charter flights originating in the United Kingdom and carrying United Kingdom passengers are required to operate aircraft in accordance with the airworthiness standards of the state with whom the aircraft is registered. Such standards must be equal to or above the airworthiness standards specified by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. Operators are also required to maintain adequate insurance cover. Charter flights of this nature must also be organised through a travel organiser holding a valid Air Travel Organisers Licence issued by the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority.

WALES

Bathing Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many E. coli per 100 ml. of water were found in the 1988 bathing water survey at Saundersfoot.

Mr. Grist: The information is shown in the following table:

Sample Date	Time	E. coli per 100 ml
18 May 1988	1145	20
1 June 1988	1215	110
8 June 1988	1215	800
15 June 1988	1200	10
22 June 1988	1200	170
29 June 1988	1230	15,000
6 July 1988	1230	< 100
13 July 1988	1200	200
20 July 1988	1200	1,300
27 July 1988	1200	600
3 August 1988	1045	500
10 August 1988	1215	500
11 August 1988	1210	100
17 August 1988	1145	600
24 August 1988	1150	400
31 August 1988	1200	600
13 September 1988	1215	600
14 September 1988	1145	100
21 September 1988	1200	155
26 September 1988	1230	300

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the actual E. coli figures for the three samples in Swansea bay which failed the EEC coliform directive in the summer of 1988.

Mr. Grist: The information is shown in the following table:

Sample Date	Time	E. coli per 100 ml
28 June 1988	0945	2,100
31 August 1988	1200	11,000
27 September 1988	1200	5,200

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the highest level of E. coli per 100 ml found in the 1988 bathing water survey at *(a)* Cold Knapp, Barry, and *(b)* Oxwich bay;

(2) what was the highest level of total coliforms per 100 ml found in the 1988 bathing water survey at *(a)* Oxwich bay, *(b)* Saundersfoot and *(c)* Whitesands.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is contained within the 1988 bathing water survey report, a copy of which, as the hon. Member will know, has already been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the details of those samples in *(a)* Kinmel bay, *(b)* Rhyl and *(c)* Cold Knapp, Barry, sampled during the 1988 bathing water survey which failed to conform to the standards of the EEC coliform directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The information is shown in the following table:

Date	Time of sample	Total Coliforms per 100 ml	E Coli per 100 ml
Kinmel Bay[1]			
4 July 1988	1140	24,500	3,100
29 August 1988	1130	11,000	2,940
1 September 1988	1130	>50,000	4,400
28 September 1988	1120	12,200	4,700
Rhyl[1]			
5 May 1988	1150	23,600	—
29 July 1988	0850	>30,000	5,300
29 August 1988	1055	17,400	8,400
1 September 1988	1240	11,300	2,600
28 September 1988	1045	10,700	2,090
Cold Knapp[2]			
26 September 1988	0935	12,100	4,700
27 September 1988	1350	32,000	20,000

[1] Total number of samples taken 21.
[2] Total number of samples taken 18.

The samples which failed account for only a small proportion of those taken throughout the 1988 season. The medians were much lower. The Welsh water authority has in hand a programme of remedial works to ensure full compliance with the EC bathing water directive of all listed bathing waters in the Principality.

M4 Motorway

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action his Department will be taking to minimise delays to traffic during the construction of the M4 between Baglan and Lonlas.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Only that part of the A48 trunk road between Earlswood and Lonlas is likely to be significantly affected by construction of this final section of the M4. Detailed traffic management measures will be taken by the appointed contractor to ensure the continuing free flow of vehicles along it.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information his Department holds that enables him to assess the extent to which potable water in Wales complies with the European Community directive relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption (80/77/EEC).

Mr. Grist: Welsh water authority has the responsibility for ensuring that potable water within the Principality meets the standards of the directive.

The Welsh Office holds information concerning time-limited derogations and delays, which have been granted under articles 9 and 20 of the directive, in respect of sources which do not fully meet the standards. The water authority's progress in achieving compliance where derogations and delays have been granted is regularly reviewed.

The authority and the water companies in Wales have also submitted preliminary programmes of remedial work in relation to the proposed drinking water quality regulations.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the cost at current prices to the Welsh water authority of complying with the European Community directive relating to the quality of water for human consumption (80/77/EEC).

Mr. Grist: The full cost of the programme is still being evaluated.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the cost at current prices to the Welsh water authority to bring the 11 bathing beaches which failed to comply with bathing water directive (76/160/EEC) into conformity.

Mr. Grist: The authority is currently reviewing its programme of remedial works which aims to achieve compliance of all listed waters. The full cost of the programme has yet to be evaluated.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was his Department's response to the Countryside Commission's consultation papers "Paths, Routes and Trails" and "Changing the Rights of Way Network."

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office received copies of both papers but did not comment on either since it was neither necessary nor appropriate to do so.

ENERGY

Oil and Gas Resources

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he will publish his next report on the development of the oil and the gas resources of the United Kingdom (the Brown Book).

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend has today published the latest edition of the "Brown Book", and has arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House and the Vote Office. The report gives a detailed account of oil and gas development during 1988.

PRIME MINISTER

Westland

Q92. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister whether Sir Leon Brittan cleared with No. 10 Downing street his statement on Channel 4 television, broadcast on 7 April, that Mr. Charles Powell and Mr. Bernard Ingham had expressly approved the decision to disclose a Law Officer's letter in the Westland affair.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the many answers given in statements and in reply to questions on this subject.

Penrhiwceiber

Q110. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to visit Penrhiwceiber.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

International Sugar Organisation

Q188. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Prime Minister what information she has concerning an offer by the French

Government to provide free office accommodation and diplomatic immunity to the International Sugar Organisation if it moves from London to Paris; what benefits accrue to Britain from the location of the sugar, wheat, cocoa and coffee organisations in London; what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards this matter; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I understand that the International Sugar Organisation is examining a number of locations, including proposals from France and other countries as well as alternative sites in London. Her Majesty's Government welcome the location of these organisations in London which reflects the merits of London as the leading international trading centre in these products. We already provide diplomatic immunity and rates concessions for these organisations as we do for all international organisations of similar standing.

Engagements

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 25 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

CIVIL SERVICE

NUCAPS

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met the general secretary of NUCAPS; and what topics were discussed.

Mr. Luce: I have meetings from time to time with representatives of Civil Service trade unions both centrally and during visits to Departments. Matters of mutual interest are discussed.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Debt

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which major issues of debt have come up for redemption in the financial years *(a)* 1987-88 and *(b)* 1988-89; and which are expected in 1989-90.

Mr. Lilley: The information is as follows:

Per cent.				*£ million*
(a) The stocks of over £500 million redeemed in 1987-88 were:				
10½	Exchequer	Stock	1987	1,550
6½	Funding	Loan	1985-87	559
10	Treasury	Stock	1987	1,600
3	Treasury	Stock	1987	950
12	Treasury	Stock	1987	1,950
7¾	Treasury	Loan	1985-88	500
2	Index-linked Treasury	Stock	1988	1,352
(b) The stocks of over £500 million redeemed in 1988-89 were:				
10½	Exchequer	Stock	1988	1,450
9½	Treasury Convertible	Stock	1988	1,147
3	British Transport	Stock	1978-88	1,302
9½	Treasury	Stock	1988	2,050
11½	Treasury	Stock	1989	2,250
(c) The stocks of over £500 million to be redeemed in 1989-90 are:				
9½	Treasury Convertible	Stock	1989	854
3	Treasury	Stock	1989	500
10½	Treasury	Stock	1989	1,400
10	Exchequer	Stock	1989	2,400
11	Exchequer	Stock	1989	2,000
5	Treasury	Stock	1986-89	601
13	Treasury	Stock	1990	1,000
2	Index-linked Treasury	Stock	1990	500
11	Exchequer	Loan	1990	1,400
12½	Exchequer	Stock	1990	1,250

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the rules relating to the holding of Government debt by insurance companies and pension funds.

Mr. Lilley: I do not know which rules the hon. Member has in mind.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are in London and elsewhere and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Brooke: The number of support grades employed in the Treasury is 241; the number of vacancies in London and elsewhere are five and none respectively, of which two have existed for over one month and three have existed for over three months; there are no temporary appointments and 1 casual appointment; in 1988-89 about 49,500 hours overtime were worked in London and 1,600 hours overtime elsewhere.

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Brooke: The number of support grades employed in the Treasury is 241; the number of vacancies is five, of which two have existed for over one month and three for over three months; there are no temporary appointments and one casual appointment; in 1988-89 about 49,500 hours of overtime were worked in London and about 1,600 hours overtime elsewhere.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many instances have been detected in his

Department of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether perpetrated by authorised or unauthorised users of computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* It is not the policy of the Treasury to make public details and circumstances of computer security incidents, their perpetrators and their success or failure, since such information might be of assistance to potential attackers.

Capital Charges

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at what level the interest elements of capital charges are set for public sector capital assets; how this figure is arrived at; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* I assume my hon. Friend has in mind the returns the Government expect the public sector to earn on capital assets. I refer him to my statement on 5 April, at column *187*.

Fees and charges for non-trading public bodies will normally be set to recover a cost of capital of not less than 6 per cent. in real terms. This is based on the real pre-tax costs of capital to a private sector company raising funds for low-risk purposes.

Trading bodies such as nationalised industries are required to earn a real rate of return of 8 per cent. on their new investment programmes as a whole. This is derived from the average pre-tax real rate of return achieved on assets in the private sector.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of properties owned by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and suitable for residential accommodation have been empty for (i) up to a year and (ii) over a year; and where these properties are located, by region of the United Kingdom or local authority area.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* Her Majesty's Customs and Excise does not own any property. Apart from a few properties which are provided by traders as a condition of the grant of privileges, the freehold or leasehold of all properties on the Department's estate is vested in the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Only one building on the estate can be regarded as suitable for residential accommodation. This is situated in the Isles of Scilly and has been vacant for almost one year pending the appointment of an officer to the post for which the accommodation is provided.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Special Education Needs

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the level of spending on special education needs, as a proportion of the education budget, in each of the last three years.

Mr. Butcher: Local authority current expenditure on special education was 4·23, 4·25 and 4·26 per cent. respectively of total local authority current expenditure on education in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Henry Mellish School, Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will visit the Henry Mellish school, Nottingham, to speak to parents and children about the Government's education policies.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so.

Education Reform

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities in the course of compiling their strategic plans for further education under the requirements of the Education Reform Act and the guidance of his Department's circular 9/88, have sought and received advice from his Department.

Mr. Jackson: Representatives of 73 local education authorities have received advice on the preparation of their schemes for planning, funding and delegation under circular 9/88 at meetings with officers of the Department. A large number of authorities have also received advice over the telephone and in writing.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department employs a total of 140 staff in the support grades in London and Darlington, including 12 casual appointments. There are seven vacancies, all of which have existed for over three months. On average these staff work a total of 93 hours of overtime a week.

Language Teaching

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he plans to encourage more teaching of the Russian language; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The national curriculum will include a modern foreign language as a foundation subject at secondary level to be studied by all pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. Russian is among those modern foreign languages specified as eligible for inclusion in the national curriculum, within the framework of the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) on 3 March, at columns *338-39*. Within this framework, my right hon. Friend is encouraging schools to offer a greater diversity of languages, including Russian, and we are providing education support grants for pilot projects in some local education authorities in England to promote the preparation and implementation of plans for language diversification.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the numbers of foreign

language assistants, by subjects, in maintained schools for each year from 1978-79 to the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: The numbers are as follows:

Year	French	German	Spanish	Italian	Russian	Total
1978-79	1,710	668	162	17	4	2,561
1979-80	1,783	718	187	16	4	2,708
1980-81	1,558	640	150	16	2	2,366
1981-82	1,314	539	145	16	4	2,018
1982-83	1,279	524	127	12	3	1,945
1983-84	1,301	523	138	11	1	1,974
1984-85	1,241	537	132	8	2	1,920
1985-86	1,211	502	126	7	2	1,848
1986-87	1,260	522	149	7	2	1,940
1987-88	1,503	556	186	12	2	2,259
1988-89	1,371	539	163	7	2	2,082

Industry and Education (Links)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to ensure that representatives of the management and trade unions are treated equally in establishing links between industry and educational institutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Department welcomes the involvement of all sections of industry in the establishment of links with schools. The management of such links is for local determination; however, the DES guides for employees and schools on "Education at Work" recognise the role of trade unions in the workplace and the TUC's strong support for workplace activities for school pupils. The TUC is also involved in education through, for example, its participation in the school curriculum industry project, which is developing teaching material for schools and teacher training, and its work with the National Curriculum Council "Educating for Economic Awareness" initiative.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made on his plans for city technology colleges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The CTC programme is making excellent progress. Kingshurst opened last year. The Nottingham and Teesside CTCs will open in September, with those in Bradford, Gateshead and Dartford together with the London school for performing arts and technology due to open in 1990. Further announcements will be made soon.

Disabled People

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he plans to encourage more disabled people to become teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Department's action campaign on teacher recruitment aims to encourage more potentially good teachers to join the profession, including disabled people. Teacher training institutions and employers would of course need to satisfy themselves that all entrants to the profession possess the mental and physical capacity for the demanding job of teaching.

Higher Education

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the numbers of students in higher education in *(a)* arts and humanities and *(b)* sciences in each year from 1978-79 to the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: Readily available information is shown in the following table:

Home full-time students in higher education in Great Britain

Thousands

	Academic year beginning in								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Total all students of which	451·2	465·0	488·4	504·6	517·5	525·1	530·6	540·0	549·7
Arts	253·1	256·8	267·3	273·0	278·2	278·8	281·2	286·8	293·3
Sciences	198·1	208·2	221·1	231·5	239·3	246·3	249·4	253·1	256·5

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Sciences are defined as medicine, engineering and technology, agriculture, science and professional and vocational studies while arts includes education, business and social studies, language, arts other than language and music, drama, art and design.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any proposals to shift the balance of public funding of higher education towards the tuition fee.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has for the future funding of higher education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Higher education funding councils and other interested bodies have today been sent a paper seeking views on proposals to increase the full-time undergraduate tuition fee met through mandatory awards from its 1989-90 level of £607 to £1,600 in 1990-91 and to introduce, from 1991-92, fees differentiated by the cost of groups of courses. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Music Education

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest available figure for the number of pupils in secondary schools to whom music education is available only upon the payment of fees.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not available. The Education Reform Act prohibits charging for all tuition provided during school hours, with the sole exception of individual tuition in the playing of a musical instrument.

Paper (Recycling)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to encourage the recycling of paper; and what advice is given to schools and colleges on this.

Mr. Butcher: The statutory attainment targets for science in the national curriculum include a requirement for children to know that some waste materials can be recycled. The recycling of paper, and the use of recycled paper, by educational institutions is a matter for them and, as appropriate, their maintaining LEAs. I hope they will consider the matter sympathetically. The Department is currently considering the use of recycled paper for its own purposes.

Expenditure (Derbyshire)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he proposes to make additional funds available for the Derbyshire county council's capital expenditure on education as a consequence of the recent visit of a delegation to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: As I said at the meeting on 6 April, the application of our normal criteria resulted in Derbyshire receiving 52 per cent. of its submitted plans for prescribed capital expenditure in 1989-90 compared with a national average for LEAs of 34 per cent. There are no extra resources over and above those notified for distribution to LEAs for the financial year 1989-90.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money was spent per pupil in Derbyshire in *(a)* special education, *(b)* primary schools, *(c)* secondary schools and *(d)* tertiary education from each of the years from 1978-79 to the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Butcher: The available information is given in the table:

Net institutional expenditure[1] per pupil[2]

	Primary £	*Secondary* £	*Special* £
1978-79	340	490	n/a
1979-80	395	565	n/a
1980-81	500	705	2,445
1981-82	575	795	2,985
1982-83	635	870	3,305
1983-84	690	950	3,450
1984-85	730	1,020	3,855
1985-86	780	1,125	5,060
1986-87	875	1,305	5,495
1987-88	[3]990	1,530	6,220

[1] Net institutional expenditure includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

[2] The figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DoE and pupil number returns to DES.

[3] The figure for 1987-88 includes nursery school pupils.

Separate figures are not available for tertiary education which forms a part of further education.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will report on progress on monitoring, by ethnicity, applications to universities and polytechnics.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that the Universities Central Council on Admissions and the Polytechnic Central Admissions System will include an ethnicity question on application forms for candidates applying for full-time degree course places in autumn 1990.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on steps taken by his Department to secure improved access to higher education by people from ethnic minorities.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has made clear the priority it attaches to increasing participation in higher education, particularly from groups that are currently under-represented and it has taken a number of measures to that end. The Universities Central Council on Admissions and the Polytechnic Central Admissions System will include an ethnicity question on application forms for candidates applying for full-time degree course places in autumn 1990. In addition, my right hon. Friend announced on 12 April at column *528*, the establishment of a national framework for the recognition of access courses for students who lack the traditional qualifications for entrance to higher education. Some access courses are specifically targeted at ethnic minorities and staff are funded under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966.

We are funding a number of projects which are investigating and developing ways of enhancing the provision of access courses. Initial teacher training institutions have also developed a range of courses specifically aimed at people from ethnic minorities which are designed to build on their previous experience.

All these measures should help to improve access to higher education for people from ethnic minorities.

Student Unions

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much has been spent on student unions in each of the last 10 years by *(a)* central Government and *(b)* local government expressed in (i) cost terms and (ii) real terms with 1979 = 100.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not available. I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Andrwew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much his survey on student unions cost to compile

Mr. Jackson: As I indicated in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on 1 December 1988, at column *356*, work on the survey was undertaken by a team of officials which includes student affairs among its normal responsibilities. This was supplemented, from 9 December, by overtime payments and part-time assistance, the total cost of which was £1,720.

TRANSPORT

Rotherhithe Tunnel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason a traffic census point was established at the north end of the Rotherhithe tunnel on the morning of 11 April.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is one of a number of sites being used for a traffic survey to collect data needed to develop proposals for improving the A13 trunk road in the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham.

Air Security

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has received a request for a meeting with the chairman and members of the board of Manchester international airport to discuss the introduction of an airports departure tax; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider revising the existing methods of funding security methods at airports; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will support measures to introduce the funding of security costs at Manchester international airport through the imposition of an airports departure tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend has received a letter from the chairman of Manchester Airport plc proposing the introduction of an airport departure tax and requesting a meeting to discuss the matter. He has replied as follows:

"Thank you for your letter of 22 March proposing a meeting to discuss your proposal for an Airport Departure Tax to finance aviation security.

This ground has been gone over many times in recent years. As you say, from 1978 to 1983 aviation security was financed through the aviation security fund, set up under the powers which are now contained in part IV of the Aviation Security Act 1982. This proved to be bureaucratic, complicated and costly to administer, with the Department collecting money from the industry with one hand and paying it out to it again with the other, and it provided little incentive to efficiency. Consequently, a review undertaken in 1982, at the request of the industry and in consultation with all sections of it, concluded that the financing of aviation security would be more straightforward, that unnecessary and complex procedures would be avoided, that incentives to carry out security measures effectively would be increased, and that cross-subsidisation would be eliminated, if the fund were abolished. The fund was wound up accordingly in 1983, and the airports and airlines became responsible for financing aviation security costs from their revenue, in exactly the same way as they meet other operating expenditure.

This arrangement has much to commend it. It is simple and logical, and it is consistent with the arrangements in other areas, such as aviation safety. It ensures that costs fall where they are incurred, and thus produce an incentive to avoid waste and inefficiency

The whole matter was reviewed again most thoroughly after the publication in 1986 of the House of Commons Transport Select Committee's report on airport security. It recommended that an aviation security fund should be re-established, and that it should be financed by a levy on passengers which should be clearly itemised on the ticket price. In their response to this report the Government rejected these recommendations, pointing out that the arguments against financing aviation security through a Government-administered fund were still as strong as when the original fund was wound up.

However, the response went on to say that, as some sections of the industry had recently proposed a variety of possible alternative arrangements, the Department would look at these suggestions further in consultation with the industry. This review was carried out through the National Aviation Security Committee, It examined in detail all the suggestions put forward, including some very similar to the arrangement you now seem to be proposing. It found that there was no widespread support for any of these schemes, and no grounds for believing that any of them would be more satisfactory overall than the present arrangements.

In connection with the various proposals put forward for some kind of airport departure tax the review noted that security costs are not necessarily directly proportional to the number of passengers passing through a particular airport. Consequently either such a tax would have to be set at different levels for each airport—in which case considerable accounting resources would need to be devoted each year to working out the appropriate level at which it should be set for the coming year at each of the 50 airports in the national aviation security programme and in checking that the money was being properly used; or the tax would have to be the same as each airport—which would involve virtually the same arrangements as did the aviation security fund for the Government collecting the money and paying it out again against authorised expenditure.

After considering the findings of the review, Ministers reaffirmed their belief that the current arrangements were the most satisfactory and effective ones possible and that they should not be changed. That remains our position, and I must tell the hon. Gentleman frankly that I can see no point in meeting him to discuss his proposal for a departure tax unless and until he can demonstrate that:

(a) it has substantial support within the industry as a whole;

(b) it would not suffer from the same disadvantages as did the aviation security fund or involve additional accounting resources; and

(c) it would be more satisfactory overall than the present arrangements.

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the imposition of a total ban on the carriage of personal radios on aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is not just personal radios, but a whole range of portable electrical items, from pocket calculators, through electric shavers and hair driers, to lap top computers, which pose particular security problems.

A complete ban on the carriage of such items on aircraft is not practicable.

We have reinforced the advice to airports and airlines about the dangers, and instructed that such items should be examined particularly closely. Passengers will be prevented from retaining them in cases where the security staff are unable to satisfy themselves that they are harmless.

As the problem is an international one we have, as my right hon. Friend announced on 21 February, at columns *556-57*, arranged for the International Civil Aviation Organisation to address the matter.

Flight Paths

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what actions he has taken, consequent to the air disaster on the M1 motorway adjacent to the east midlands airport, to review the rules and practices concerning the siting of residential, commercial, or industrial buildings and public transport facilities beneath, or adjacent to, the flight paths to and from airport runways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Department of the Environment circular 39/81, a copy of which is in the Library, already requires planning authorities to refer to the Civil Aviation Authority or the Ministry of Defence for advice details of proposed developments close to busy airports. The 1989 review of accident statistics relative to public safety zones will pay particular regard to roads and railways running through such zones.

Trunk Roads

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which stretches of road are currently subject to negotiation with Staffordshire county council on trunk road status; and whether he will require standards currently adopted by Stoke on Trent city council for principal roads to apply on roads which change to trunk road status.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are discussing with the county council proposals to trunk part of A500 and to detrunk parts of A34, A5 and A449 in Staffordshire. The improvement and maintenance of trunk roads is carried out to the Department's standards.

Hazardous Cargoes

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any recent representations seeking amendment of existing international marine law regarding the carriage and protection of dangerous chemicals at sea, in the light of the recent sinking in the English Channel of a tanker carrying toxic material; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Following the recent incident in the English Channel I have received one representation seeking amendment to the international marine law. I have also received a number of suggestions on how the marine environment can be protected when such an incident occurs. Some of these have been foreshadowed by the International Maritime Organisation and will become part of the regulatory regime in the near future.

A6 (M) Bypass

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the report of the inspector on the proposed route of the Stockport north-south A6 (M) bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The inspector's report is being considered. We hope to announce a decision soon.

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None. Nowhere.

Roads (Financing)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish a consultative paper on the private financing of roads.

Mr. Portillo: Shortly.

Midland Mainline Electrification

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail about the midland mainline electrification.

Mr. Portillo: The midland main line already has a good service which is being improved. It is for British Rail to consider whether the very large cost of electrifying the line would be justified by operating improvements and revenue gains, and to put forward a case if it believes it to be worthwhile. The completion of the single European market in 1992 is unlikely to have a significant effect on this essentially business decision.

Orange Badge Scheme

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has completed his review of the operation of the orange badge scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Yes. The review raised many complex issues. We are grateful to all those who commented, and in particular for the report from the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC). A copy of its report has been placed in the Library.

The rate at which badges are issued has increased rapidly since 1986. Between March 1986 and March 1988, the number of badges rose from about 800,000 to about 1 million. The scheme is losing the respect of the general public, who see apparently able-bodied people using cars bearing badges. Without changes the scheme will become unworkable.

The parking concessions provided by the scheme are essential to those with the greatest mobility problems. We propose to accept the DPTAC's main recommendation —that eligibility for badges should be more closely related to eligibility for mobility allowance. This will concentrate badges on those severely disabled people who need them most.

We intend to hold further discussions with organisations representing people with disabilities, the British Medical Association and local authority associations to establish ways in which the new eligibility criteria can be introduced and to explore the implications for the financing of the scheme.

Badges will continue to be issued automatically to people receiving mobility allowance, or using a vehicle supplied by a Government Department or getting a grant towards their own vehicle and to registered blind people.

We propose to introduce a redesigned passport-type badge which will be more robust and will incorporate space for a photograph of the holder. The new badge will be designed to reduce abuse of the scheme and to make it clear that it is for the personal use of the badge holder. We shall be consulting on the design and wording of the new badge.

The DPTAC proposed that the two-hour limit on parking on yellow lines should be removed completely or, at the very least, extended to four hours. Such an extension could lead to problems of traffic management and increase congestion, given the number of badges currently on issue. We propose to discuss with local authority associations and the police extending the limit to three hours and providing more designated spaces for parking by people with mobility handicaps.

I have today written to the four central London authorities asking them to explore with the DPTAC the scope for introducing some elements of the scheme in those parts of central London where it does not at present apply. This could do much to give disabled people greater mobility in central London.

We propose further measures to simplify the operation of the scheme. In particular, these would:

(a) make recipients of war pensioners' mobility supplement automatically eligible for badges.
(b) permit the issue of badges for the same period as mobility allowance and war pensioners' mobility supplement. for those in receipt of those allowances, up to a maximum of five years. Other badges would continue to be reviewed at three-yearly intervals.
(c) allow local authorities to introduce four-hour time limits in on-street parking bays reserved for disabled people, where local authorities wish to encourage the use of such bays by shoppers rather than for all-day parking.
(d) encourage local authorities to warn badgeholders who are misusing badges prior to considering withdrawing the badge, and to issue renewal reminders. Many authorities do this already.

Further possible changes to the scheme were aired in the discussion paper, or suggested in response to it. We believe that other aspects of the scheme should continue as they are. In particular, we consider that registered blind people should continue to qualify automatically for badges and that otherwise eligibility should be restricted to those with the most severe mobility problems. We must protect the value of the orange badge if it is to be of real help to those who need it most.

Validity of orange badges which are already issued will not be affected by the proposals. Badge holders will be assessed under new criteria only when their current badges have expired and following introduction of the new criteria. Badges are reviewed every three years.

The Department has produced a leaflet in the traffic topics series explaining in more detail the proposals and the background to them. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Vehicle Inspectorate Plan

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the vehicle inspectorate executive agency business plan for 1989-90 will be published.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The business plan has been published today. Copies are available in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Turbines (Rivers)

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many privately operated electricity generating turbines are installed on rivers in Northern Ireland; and which Government Department has responsibility for permitting and overseeing their operation.

Mr. Viggers: No central register of privately operated electricity generating turbines is held by Northern Ireland Government Departments and thus the information sought is not available.

No one Government Department has overall responsibility for privately operated electricity generating turbines on rivers. The Northern Ireland Departments of Agriculture, Environment and Economic Development have statutory responsibilities for installations affecting the flow in a particular watercourse for water abstraction and for health and safety at work considerations arising from the operation of such turbines.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origin of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) what steps he has taken to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment at his Department.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Within Northern Ireland religious affiliation is a more significant consideration for equality of opportunity than ethnic origin. The Northern Ireland Civil Service therefore records details of religious affiliation together with sex (and disabilities if any) of applicants. It does not monitor the ethnic origin of staff nor has it any plans to do so.

The home Civil Service conducted a programme of ethnic origin surveys over four years, covering all staff, and these surveys were completed in June 1988. The Northern Ireland Office in London took part in these surveys.

The Northern Ireland Office continues to monitor staff as they join and to update its records. The home Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Civil Service are fully committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all applicants including any from ethnic minorities.

The Northern Ireland Office is an equal opportunity employer and this is emphasised in all our recruiting campaigns and advertising.

Promotion opportunities are open to all our staff and in all cases the promotion is gained on merit. No specific steps have been taken to recruit ethnic minorities to top grades.

Agriculture Improvement Scheme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount, in grants, paid out by the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland, under the agriculture improvement scheme in each of the years since 1985 to applicants from each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. It has been given by county.

Agriculture Improvement Scheme
Agriculture Improvement Regulations
Agriculture Improvement Scheme (National)

Counties	*Grant 1986-87*	*Grant 1987-88*	*Grant 1988-89*
Antrim	2,706,655	1,711,213	545,763
Armagh	1,240,358	1,016,101	445,891
Down	361,852	452,119	265,245
Fermanagh	708,371	730,625	618,072
Londonderry	839,608	582,122	416,779
Tyrone	2,567,134	2,320,384	1,561,530
TOTAL	8,423,978	6,785,564	3,853,280

Agriculture Improvement Regulations (European Community)

Counties	*Grant 1986-87*	*Grant 1987-88*	*Grant 1988-89*
Antrim	396,137	972,419	1,479,959
Armagh	357,520	1,158,318	1,849,241
Down	206,003	682,963	859,574
Fermanagh	191,618	604,120	1,139,423
Londonderry	282,782	785,043	826,249
Tyrone	439,408	1,424,132	2,142,174
TOTAL	1,873,468	5,626,995	8,296,620

Job Creation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the number of jobs promoted by the Industrial Development Board and its predecessor, the Department of Commerce, for *(a)* indigenous firms and *(b)* overseas firms in Northern Ireland since 1978-79; how many of these jobs are the result of (i) new enterprise or (ii) expansion; what is the average cost per job; and how many of these jobs promoted were actually realised;

(2) how many jobs have been promoted by the Industrial Development Board or its predecessor the Department of Commerce in the following industrial groups *(a)* engineering, *(b)* textiles, clothing and leather, *(c)* food, drink and tobacco and *(d)* all other industries; what was the average cost of each job promoted; and how many of these jobs were actually realised.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* Job promotion figures for the period April 1978 to December 1988 inclusive are as follows:

	Job promotions				
	Indigenous firms		Overseas firms		
	New	Expansions	New	Expansions	Total
Department of Commerce					
1978-79	357	1,204	4,165	1,364	7,090
1979-80	308	1,793	3,100	2,333	7,534
1980-81	430	769	178	1,928	3,305
1981-82	131	381	348	815	1,675
1982-83 (from 1 April 1982-31 August 1982)	41	312	—	513	866
Industrial Development Board					
1982-83 (1 September 1982-31 March 1983)	224	751	159	1,791	2,925
1983-84	715	1,191	539	1,111	3,556
1984-85	394	1,478	548	2,847	5,267
1985-86	204	1,224	224	1,258	2,910
1986-87	208	1,124	415	2,440	4,187
1987-88	183	2,616	867	1,634	5,300
1988-89 (9 months to 31 December 1988)	329	1,071	1,664	1,428	4,492
Total	3,524	13,914	12,207	19,462	49,107

In this period offers of assistance have been made with the intention of safeguarding employment as well as promoting new jobs. In such cases the assistance offered is not disaggregated between various job categories and consequently it is not possible to identify separately the average cost per job promoted. The average cost for all jobs assisted during 1987-88 was £9,362. Job realisation figures could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Jobs promoted by industrial group

	Engineering	Textiles clothing and leather	Food drink and tobacco	All other industries	Total
Department of Commerce					
1978-79	4,634	1,282	144	1,030	7,090
1979-80	4,802	1,786	325	621	7,534
1980-81	1,494	1,092	264	455	3,305
1981-82	667	450	89	469	1,675
[1]1982-83	542	204	16	104	866
Industrial Development Board					
[2]1982-83	1,773	394	551	207	2,925
1983-84	1,276	1,425	545	310	3,556
1984-85	1,615	1,286	1,309	1,057	5,267
1985-86	465	1,194	401	850	2,910
1986-87	1,678	1,177	507	825	4,187
1987-88	836	1,839	1,452	1,173	5,300
[3]1988-89	2,038	1,124	547	783	4,492
Total	21,820	13,253	6,150	7,884	49,107

[1] From 1 April 1982 to 31 August 1982.
[2] From 1 September 1982 to 31 March 1983.
[3] 9 months to 31 December 1988.

Human Rights

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representations he has received about the denial of human rights or the use of torture in Northern Ireland; and which organisations made these representations.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I receive representations on a wide range of matters but no central record is kept of those which allege denial of human rights in Northern Ireland.

SCOTLAND

Playgrounds

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what correspondence he has received from Nithsdale road link-up group expressing concern about supervision of children in school playgrounds; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has received representations from the Nithsdale road link-up group and many other expressions of concern from parents and parents' groups about the absence or inadequacy of playground supervision in education authority schools generally.

Local arrangements for playground supervision are for education authorities, who have a duty of care at common law for pupils at their schools. The Government share the concern of parents that children should be properly cared for, and have made provision of £4 million within total education provision for 1989-90 to enable authorities to discharge their duty in this matter.

A new clause—which would have the effect of putting a statutory duty on authorities to provide adequate levels

of supervision of pupils—has been tabled for discusion by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) in the Committee which is currently considering the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Bill. The hon. Gentleman may wish to attend the public gallery to listen to the debate.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, when evaluating contracts in competitive tendering of ancillary services, the cost of redundancy and early retirement is set against the private tender.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Yes. Redundancy payments are real costs to the Health Service and boards are specifically instructed to have regard to them in the final assessment of all bids relating to competitive tendering. Similarly premature retirement costs, if any, are also required to be taken into account.

Press Releases

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press releases have been issued by himself, his Minister of State and each of his Parliamentary Under-Secretaries since June 1987.

Mr. Rifkind: The total number of news releases issued by the Scottish Information Office in the period 1 June 1987 to 31 March 1989 covering the activities of myself and my ministerial colleagues was 2,078. The number issued on behalf of each Minister was as follows:

	Number
Secretary of State for Scotland	561
Minister of State (Commons)	426
Minister of State (Lords)	238
Minister for Home Affairs and the Environment	331
Minister for Education and Health	522

Highland Health Board

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 April, why a separate meeting was held with the manager and chairman of Highland health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: To discuss matters of common interest.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Rifkind: The Scottish Office (including Scottish Prison Service) position at 1 April 1989 is as follows:

a. 318·5;
b. 26, of which 20 had existed for over one month and 14 for over 3 months;
c. 7·5 (all casual appointments);
d. since May 1988 overtime hours worked amount to 1,097 (London) and 28,762 (elsewhere).

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Rifkind: None.

Forest Workers

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the numbers of forest workers employed on forest management activities and harvesting activities by the Forestry Commission in each conservancy area since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is given in the following tables:

Conservancy	*Total*[1]
1979[2]	
North East England	391
North West England	387
East England	418
South East England	254
South West England	370
North Wales	474
South Wales	445
North Scotland	547
East Scotland	358
West Scotland	440
South Scotland	552
Great Britain	4,636

Conservancy	*Forest management*	*Harvesting*	*Total*[1]
1984			
North East England	170	121	291
North West England	125	184	309
East England	146	180	326
South East England	134	69	203
South West England	142	168	310
North Wales	183	177	360
South Wales	204	106	310
North Scotland	275	135	410
East Scotland	129	132	261
West Scotland	214	101	315
South Scotland	295	211	506
Great Britain	2,017	1,584	3,601

Conservancy[3]	*Forest management*	*Harvesting*	*Total*[1]
1989			
North England	222	129	351
East England	188	159	347
West England	166	108	274
Wales	276	149	425
North Scotland	298	114	412
Mid Scotland	215	61	276
South Scotland	234	134	368
Great Britain	1,599	854	2,453

[1] The figures do not include contractors.
[2] The 1979 figures are not available by activity.
[3] The number of conservancies was reduced from 11 to 7 on 1 April 1985.

Radioactive Waste

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department gave to Nirex

which enabled Dounreay to be placed on the short list as a possible site for the disposal of radioactive waste; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The decision by Nirex to include Dounreay on the short list of sites for investigation was taken as a result of their own site selection procedure. I am not aware of any information provided by the Scottish Development Department which was material to this decision.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department has made any predictions of the economic effects upon the local economy of Caithness should Dounreay be chosen by Nirex for the disposal of solid low and intermediate-level radioactive waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The economic effects would depend on the nature of any disposal facility which might be established. As a basic guide Nirex has suggested that, if construction were phased, some 350 jobs on construction and operation would be created during the 50-year operational life of the repository, without taking account of associated secondary employment.

Public Rights of Way

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was his Department's response to the Countryside Commission's consultation papers "Paths, Routes and Trails" and "Changing the Rights of Way Network".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No response has been made as the papers relate specifically to the situation in England and Wales.

Renaval Fund

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail any recent applications, made by the Scottish Office, for financial assistance from the European Community by way of the Renaval fund which is designed to provide assistance to those communities which have suffered a decline in their shipbuilding and marine engineering industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 21 April 1989]:* Applications under Renaval are currently under consideration and should go forward very shortly to the European Commission.

Employment Training

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the local authorities in Scotland which are training agents or training managers for employment training.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* Scottish local authorities operating as training agents or training managers for employment training are as follows:

Training Agents
Borders Regional Council
Caithness District Council
Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council
Fife Regional Council
Grampian Regional Council
Orkney Islands Council
Wigtown District Council

Training Managers
Angus District Council
Argyll and Bute District Council
Borders Regional Council
Caithness District Council
Clydesdale District Council
Cumnock and Doon Valley District Council
Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council
Dunfermline District Council
East Kilbride District Council
Fife Regional Council
Grampian Regional Council
Hamilton District Council
Highland Regional Council
Kirkcaldy District Council
Lochaber District Council
Midlothian District Council
Moray District Council
North East Fife District Council
Orkney Islands Council
Ross and Cromarty District Council
Wigtown District Council

DEFENCE

Air Crash (Pembrokeshire)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the findings of the inquiry into the air crash on 6 May 1988 near Solva St. Davids, Pembrokeshire, involving an RAF aircraft.

Mr. Neubert: I believe that my hon. Friend may be referring to the accident to a Royal Air Force Hawk aircraft which took place shortly after take off from RAF Brawdy on 13 May 1988. The board of inquiry into this accident is now complete and a summary of its findings will be published shortly. I will send a copy to my hon. Friend.

Gamma Shine

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the phenomenon of gamma shine and its implications for the safety of naval personnel;

(2) what studies have been carried out into the possible hazardous effects of gamma shine; and if he will place such reports in the Library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the context of submarine nuclear reactors, gamma shine is the term used to refer to the gamma radiation emitted by fission products contained within the vessel in the unlikely event of an accident. The hazardous effects of gamma radiation are well known and are documented in numerous published reports.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) why the Clyde area public safety scheme was revised in May 1985 and the gamma shine maximum hazard distance increased from 50 to 250m; and why the Scottish special safety scheme was similarly revised;

(2) if he will list the date of the latest revision of the special safety schemes at all ports with Z berths; and if he will state in each case the recommendations for dealing with gamma shine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All public and special safety schemes lay down a distance within which automatic countermeasures would be taken against radiation

hazards, including gamma shine, in the event of an accident. Monitoring equipment is in place at every berth visited by nuclear powered submarines, either permanently or for the duration of the visit, in order to detect and quantify any radiation hazard. The countermeasures are designed to ensure that radiation dose rates to personnel do not exceed the limits set by the National Radiological Protection Board for nuclear accidents. Specific measures may vary depending on the circumstances of each particular berth; they include sheltering and/or evacuation.

In addition, some safety schemes give an estimate of the extent of the hazard from gamma shine in the event of an accident. In all cases this is less than the distance within which automatic countermeasures would be taken. The estimates contained in the Clyde public safety scheme and the Scottish special safety scheme were revised in the light of NRPB recommendations in 1985, but no change to the planned countermeasures was required.

The dates of the most recent revisions of public and special safety schemes for ports with Z berths are as follows.

	Dates
Portsmouth Special Safety Scheme	October 1988
Southampton Special Safety Scheme	February 1988
Devon Public Safety Scheme	September 1988
Barrow Public Safety Scheme	August 1988
Barry and Cardiff Special Safety Scheme	September 1988
Liverpool Special Safety Scheme	December 1988
Torbay Special Safety Scheme	August 1988
Scotland Special Safety Scheme	August 1988
Clyde Public Safety Scheme	July 1988
Currently under revision	
Portland Special Safety Scheme	August 1988
Rosyth Public Safety Scheme	March 1986

Lance Missile

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received from his United States counterpart concerning the length of time required to modernise the Lance missile; and what assessment he has made.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[pursuant to his answer, 20 April 1989, c. 279]:* The US Administration has kept allies fully informed about their development programme for a successor to the Lance missile. The selection by the US of a launcher at the end of last year was geared to having a new system available for deployment by the mid-1990s.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Eggs

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will press the European Commission to introduce equivalent standards for egg producers as those now pertaining in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on measures being taken to ensure equality of competition between European egg producers.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 4 April at column *51* and the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on 20 April at column *280*.

My Department has supported the EC Commission's initiative in proposing measures to deal with a range of zoonoses, including salmonella, on a Communitywide basis, and is contributing constructively to ensure that progress is as rapid as possible.

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department does not use any of the printers specified.

Potato Marketing Board

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the working of the Potato Marketing Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to make an announcement on the result of the Potato Marketing Board review.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 19 April at column *175*.

Pesticides

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* the pesticides for which there are international safety limits; and if he will indicate in each case whether the safety limit is accepted by his Department and what action is taken to see that the limit is invariably observed.

Mr. Ryder: International acceptable daily intakes for pesticide residues are published by the codex alimentarius commission of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Health Organisation. The United Kingdom accepts these unless there are sound scientific reasons for not doing so. Our approval procedures take ADIs into account; we have a range of maximum residue levels which, while they are not themselves safety limits, must be toxicologically acceptable; and regular monitoring of pesticide residues in food provides a check that MRLs—and hence ADIs—are not being exceeded.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the pesticides used on food are used in order to *(a)* preserve the food or prolong the shelf life, *(b)* improve the appearance and *(c)* increase the yield of the crop.

Mr. Ryder: It is not possible to provide the information requested. All agricultural pesticides, including herbicides are used with the ultimate aim of producing good quality marketable produce with minimal crop losses.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department was informed by his United States counterpart of the concern in the United States of America, about the apple spray Alar; what action he took following the receipt of information; and when he did so.

Mr. Ryder: Officials in my Department received information about the United States Environmental Protection Agency's action on daminozide (marketed as Alar) on 9 February 1989. On 10 February they requested all available data from the manufacturer and supplier, including the studies submitted to the EPA, in order to carry out an emergency review. The data have been supplied and have been considered by independent experts on the advisory committee on pesticides, whose conclusions will shortly be made public.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence of safety was considered by the advisory committee on pesticides when, in 1980, it approved the apple spray Alar.

Mr. Ryder: The advisory committee on pesticides considered an application for clearance of daminozide, the active ingredient of Alar products, in 1967. The application was supported by a full toxicological, residue and environmental data package according to the standards of the time.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the response of his Department to the European Economic Community directive which would compel retailers to inform customers of the pesticides used on the fruit and vegetables they sell.

Mr. Ryder: While I am in favour of informative labelling of food there are a number of technical problems that will arise if the European Commission's proposal is implemented. The United Kingdom delegation has therefore expressed some reservations in the discussions which have taken place to date.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to prevent retailers from selling fruit and vegetables which have pesticide residues which are above international safety limits.

Mr. Ryder: I am not aware of any international safety limits for pesticide residues on fruit and vegetables. However the Government brought into force on 1 January this year a wide range of maximum residue levels for pesticides in foodstuffs. These take account of acceptable daily intakes for individual chemicals published by the codex alimentarius commission as described in my reply earlier today.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pesticides are known to be used on food; and which of these are thought to be the most dangerous if excessive residues remain.

Mr. Ryder: Of the 400 or so active ingredients currently approved for use in the United Kingdom, some two thirds do not leave detectable residues. Ministers in six Government Departments must be satisfied that usage will not result in residue levels likely to pose a hazard to health before any pesticide is approved for use.

Consumer Pressure Groups

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the number of consumer pressure groups which have an interest in food and on how they are financed; and if the Government make a financial contribution to any of these groups.

Mr. Ryder: Because of our statutory requirement to consult on proposals for regulations under the Food Act 1984, I am aware of up to 100 organisations which broadly represent consumer interests and have an interest in food matters. I have no detailed information on how they are financed.

The Government wholly fund the National Consumer Council, the Welsh Consumer Council, the Scottish Consumer Council, the Consumers in the European Community Group and the headquarters organisations of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and Citizens Advice Scotland. It also makes a contribution to the funding of the National Federation of Consumer Groups. All this funding is for consumer interests in general and is not specifically related to food issues.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider providing financial resources to recognised food consumer groups to permit them to carry out independent food testing similar to that carried out in the United States of America by the Natural Resources Defence Council.

Mr. Ryder: My Ministry already carries out an extensive programme of food surveillance and I am satisfied that this, together with local authority enforcement of legislative requirements, is entirely adequate to protect the interests of the consumer.

Apple Juice

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of the processed apple juices on sale in the United Kingdom that have been made from apples sprayed with Alar.

Mr. Ryder: This information is not held by my Department.

Surplus Food

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when there is to be a further distribution of European Community surplus food; if applications will be invited from old people's welfare groups, charities and similar bodies to distribute the food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: When the EC surplus food scheme was introduced in 1988 certain charitable and non-profit making organisations were designated to operate the scheme both in 1988 and in 1989. My officials have recently consulted these organisations about the quantities of beef and butter they wish to distribute in 1989 and are currently considering each bid against the United Kingdom's budget of about £14·8 million to operate the scheme in 1989. We expect to be contacting designated organisations again shortly with details of their allocations. Once tendering, processing and packaging arrangements have then been made, produce will be made available for distribution.

Salmonella

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give, by each local authority area, the number of poultry keepers who have had hens culled because of salmonella and the number of hens culled in each case.

Mr. Donald Thompson: It is not my Department's policy to divulge information which could be used to deduce the identity of individual flock owners who have had hens culled or whose flocks have been compulsorily slaughtered because of salmonella. This risk would be inherent if the information were supplied by each local authority area as requested.

The following tables set out the information for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Hen Culling Scheme (closing date for applications 5 January 1989)

Number of applications[1]	*Number of hens culled*
44	372,120

[1]Each from a separate establishment.

Compulsory Slaughter of Flocks infected with Invasive Salmonella organisms (with effect from 1 March 1989 in Great Britain)

Number of birds in each flock slaughtered
4,263
35,369
489
20,227
65,249
419
53
49,279
16,537
2,300
6,580
14,226
51
17,743
80,000
Total 312,785

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to exclude from the calculation of entitlement to family credit and income support, the receipt of child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Provision is already made in income support for children's requirements. In family credit the support for children is the total of child benefit and the child credit rates. Thus in both schemes to ignore child benefit would mean double provision.

Transitional Additions (Dumbarton)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants were awarded a transitional addition in the Dumbarton social security region in April 1988; and how many will as a result receive in April *(a)* reduced uprating and *(b)* no uprating;

(2) how many claimants in Dumbarton constituency were awarded a transitional addition in April 1988; and how many of these will as a result receive in April 1989 *(a)* reduced uprating and *(b)* no uprating;

(3) what percentage of *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* persons in receipt of a disability premium, *(c)* single parents, *(d)* unemployed married, *(e)* unemployed single, *(f)* unemployed with children and *(g)* others in receipt of income support in Dumbarton constituency will receive no increase in their benefit payments as a result of the current year's uprating because of the effect of transitional additions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 6 March, at column *445*.

Vaccine Damage Payments

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many vaccine damage payments were made in 1986; and if he will categorise these according to the age of the child, when vaccination took place, the year of the vaccination and the nature of the vaccination.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Fifteen payments were awarded in 1986 under the provisions of the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979. Details are in the table.

Vaccine damage payments scheme
Awards made in 1986 by age of child at date of vaccination, year of vaccination and type of vaccination

	Age at date of vaccination (months)	*Year vaccination was given*	*Type of vaccination cited on claim form*
1.	3—6	1973	Triple/polio
2.	6—9	1974	Triple
3.	6—9	1978	Pertussis
4.	3—6	1982	Triple/polio
5.	3—6	1962	Triple
6.	0—3	1984	Triple
7.	3—6	1967	Pertussis
8.	9—12	1981	Triple/polio
9.	9—12	1973	Pertussis
10.	3—6	1983	Pertussis
11.	3—6	1982	Pertussis
12.	6—9	1965	Triple/polio
13.	0—3	1983	Pertussis
14.	6—9	1974	Pertussis
15.	15—18	1949	Diptheria

Social Fund

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* budgeting loans and *(b)* community care grants were awarded to each of the 15 client groups defined by his Department for (i) Great Britain as a whole, (ii) the north-east region and (iii) each of the four offices serving the Bradford metropolitan area, for the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* The information available is shown in the table.

Table
Budgeting Loans and Community Care Grants: Percentage Awards by Client Groups for Year 1988-89

Budgeting Loans: Client Group (See key)	*00*	*01*	*02*	*03*	*04*	*05*	*06*	*07*	*08*	*09*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*
Great Britain	0·3	0·4	0·6	4·1	0·5	5·2	3·5	41·8	0·9	2·1	16·0	18·9	0·9	4·8	0·0	0·1
North East Region	0·2	0·3	0·7	4·1	0·4	4·5	2·9	40·5	0·9	2·2	19·8	18·1	0·9	4·3	0·0	0·1
Bradford East	0·1	0·3	0·2	3·6	0·5	4·4	2·4	42·9	0·4	2·0	18·1	18·8	1·9	4·3	0·0	0·1
Bradford South	0·1	0·3	0·6	2·9	0·3	3·7	2·2	49·3	1·0	3·0	13·8	17·3	0·9	4·2	0·0	0·0
Bradford West	0·3	0·5	0·6	2·9	0·3	3·7	2·2	35·9	1·8	5·3	10·1	25·0	1·0	6·7	0·0	0·3
Keighley	0·0	0·3	0·7	5·7	0·6	6·5	3·8	40·0	1·0	2·8	13·4	18·3	0·3	6·2	0·0	0·2
Community Care Grants																
Great Britain	0·4	4·5	3·6	14·2	1·0	4·3	9·7	24·3	0·9	1·7	9·2	16·5	1·9	7·0	0·0	1·0
North East Region	0·4	3·6	3·7	14·3	1·1	4·2	9·0	25·2	0·9	1·5	11·2	16·3	1·9	5·9	0·0	0·8
Bradford East	0·0	1·0	1·2	10·9	0·8	3·8	5·9	30·1	0·4	0·6	8·3	28·7	0·6	4·8	0·0	2·8
Bradford South	0·2	0·2	2·0	7·6	1·7	2·7	8·1	31·8	1·2	1·0	8·1	23·9	2·0	7·6	0·0	1·7
Bradford West	0·9	2·8	1·8	9·4	1·4	1·8	7·1	20·5	0·5	3·7	4·6	28·3	3·0	12·0	0·0	2·3
Keighley	0·0	1·5	1·1	5·2	0·0	4·4	4·4	35·9	0·4	2·2	8·5	20·0	2·2	9·6	0·0	4·4

Key
Code Meaning
00 Unallocated (by default).

Applicant or partner aged 60 or over
01 over 80—with income support higher pensioner premium.
02 aged 60-79—disabled with higher pensioner premium.
03 aged 60-79—with ordinary pensioner premium, or over 60 without pensioner premium.

Applicant and partner aged under 60
04 lone parent with income support disability premium.
05 family with disability premium.
06 other with disability premium.
07 lone parent without disability premium.
08 signs at UBO quarterly with income support family premium.
09 signs at UBO quarterly without family premium.
10 signing unemployed or with training allowance with family premium.
11 signing unemployed or with training allowance without family premium.
12 others with family premium.
13 others without family premium.
14 involved in trade dispute.
15 applicant not in receipt of income support.

HEALTH

NHS Reform

13. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from general practitioners in Bolton and other areas in the north-west about proposals for reform of the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have received a number of representations from GPs from Bolton and the north-west, including some passed on to me by my hon. Friend.

14. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider withdrawing the proposals on self-governing trusts contained within "Working for Patients."

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No.

15. **Sir David Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals within the National Health Service are currently in a position to provide a complete price list of all their treatments, operations and investigatory services; and how many will be required to do so by April 1991 in order to fulfil the terms of the Government's White Paper "Working for Patients."

Mr. Roger Freeman: The current level of information about costs varies from hospital to hospital. A key element of our programme of reform is to provide all 260 major acute hopitals with the computerised systems they need to manage their resources more effectively. By April 1991 significant progress in implementing these new systems will have been made at a number of sites. However, the timetable for reform set out in the White Paper will not require any hospital to be in a position then to cost each of its services at the level of detail suggested by my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from overprescribing doctors in connection with the National Health Service review.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received many representations from many doctors. I regret to say that it is not possible to distinguish between those from doctors who overprescribe and those from doctors who do not. The review will ensure that all doctors will always be able to prescribe all necessary medicines to patients.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters his Department has received since 1

January concerning the Government's approach to the National Health Service; and what proportion of these letters has been congratulatory.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received 3,500 representations about our proposals in "Working For Patients", expressing a wide range of questions and views which I shall take into account as part of the process of implementation. Many are broadly supportive, but it would not be possible, except at disproportionate cost, to establish the proportion which are congratulatory and those which are not. I am more interested in constructive comments than in congratulations or political opposition.

66. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from general practitioners following the publication of his White Paper "Working for Patients;" and of these, how many contained requests for further details on the proposals contained therein.

Mr. Mellor: We have received some 1,200 representations from general practitioners, many asking questions. Information on the numbers requesting further details rather than expressing views is not available.

59. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider introducing a pilot scheme for indicative drug budgets before going ahead with the proposals in "Working for Patients."

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 21 March, at column *562*.

45. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received from general practitioners about the proposals for practice management in the National Health Service review.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We continue to receive representations from general practitioners expressing a wide range of views. We shall take these carefully into account as the implementation process goes forward.

41. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contribution general practitioners are making in explaining to patients the National Health Service review proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Some general practitioners are giving their patients a fair description of the benefits which will result from the White Paper proposals. I have also received representations from some GPs who are plainly misleading their patients particularly by use of BMA leaflets and causing unnecessary anxieties to old and sick people. I regret this and I am taking all possible steps to correct it. I have written to all general practitioners to set the record straight and to refute the inaccuracies contained in the BMA leaflet. I hope that all responsible general practitioners will respond by entering into constructive discussion of my proposals and by ceasing to cause unnecessary concern to their patients.

35. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to meet representatives of the British Medical Association to discuss the White Paper "Working for Patients"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have had three meetings with the general medical services committee on the remuneration of general practitioners and I will have another meeting if it requests one. I will be meeting the joint consultants committee, which includes representatives of the BMA, tomorrow. I look forward to hearing that committee's views on the review proposals. The British Medical Association has not formally put any views on the review to me, although I have read its leaflets and pamphlets.

33. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the south-west concerning the proposed changes for general practitioners contained in the "Working for Patients" document.

Mr. Mellor: We have received a number of representations from the south-west, as from the rest of the country. Many are supportive of the proposals.

22. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received recent representations from the Medical Practitioners' Union about reform of the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am not aware of any such representations.

20. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received recently from doctors and other medical professions concerning his White Paper on the Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received a wide range of comments from doctors and other medical staff and shall take them carefully into account as the process of implementation goes forward.

18. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent representations he has received from family practitioners about his White Paper.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received a wide range of comments from family practitioners and shall take them carefully into account as the process of implementation goes forward.

British Medical Association

16. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of the British Medical Association; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I met members of the general medical services committee on 20 March to discuss the proposed new contract for general practitioners.

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairman of the British Medical Association; and what was discussed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I last met him formally on 22 February, when I discussed with him the remuneration of hospital doctors in the light of the Government's decisions on the nineteenth report of the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body.

65. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to meet the British Medical Association; and what he expects to discuss.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley).

25. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to answer the British Medical Association leaflet being distributed through doctors' surgeries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I disapprove strongly of the BMA leaflet which grossly misrepresents the Government's proposals. It is inaccurate and misleading and I believe could cause unnecessary and unjustified alarm to more vulnerable patients. I have therefore written to all GPs to set the record straight on the BMA's five key untrue allegations.

1. None of my proposed reforms will result in doctors running out of money, leaving them unable to prescribe for ill patients.

2. The Government's intention to reward doctors who deliver high quality care to an average list of patients will not reduce the time given to patients when they need it. Doctors who choose to have more patients will need to be available for longer hours than their colleagues with small lists. However, the contract encourages new services and higher performance rather than bigger lists. Patients will not move to doctors who have little time to see them.

3. No hospital is being encouraged to opt out of the NHS nor to reduce the range of services provided. All essential local services will be safeguarded by the DHA's legal powers and duty to require local delivery of them.

4. The Government do not wish to save money by doctors taking the cheapest option. They wish to ensure that, within the resources available, more patients receive high quality care. Doctors who are given more choice and control over resources will make judgments over quality of care more than cost.

5. The commitment of the Government to the NHS is absolute and will remain so. However, after 40 years, it is sensible to seek ways of improving the way in which its huge and growing resources are used.

I will continue to take every opportunity to set out an accurate account of my proposals and to try to engage members of the medical profession in serious discussion of them.

General Practitioners

17. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners have indicated their intention of resigning their contracts.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am aware that some local medical committees have discussed the question of resignation, but very few indeed of the letters I have received refer to this possibility.

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average number of people registered with each doctor under the National Health Service in each year since 1959.

Mr. Mellor: The average number of patients on general medical practitioners' lists in England for each year since 1959 is:

	Number
1959	2,380
1960	2,385
1961	2,388
1962	2,322
1963	2,343
1964	2,379
1965	2,428
1966	2,470
1967	2,490
1968	2,494
1969	2,495
1970	2,478
1971	2,460
1972	2,421
1973	2,396
1974	2,384
1975	2,365
1976	2,351
1977	2,331
1978	2,312
1979	2,286
1980	2,247
1981	2,201
1982	2,155
1983	2,116
1984	2,089
1985	2,068
1986	2,042
1987	2,020

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners worked in the National Health Service in each year since 1959.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is set out in the table.

Date	*Number of unrestricted principals in England*
1 July 1959	18,467
1 July 1960	18,643
1 October 1961	18,905
1 October 1962	19,031
1 October 1963	19,065
1 October 1964	18,978
1 October 1965	18,784
1 October 1966	18,612
1 October 1967	18,617
1 October 1968	18,732
1 October 1969	18,901
1 October 1970	19,099
1 October 1971	19,374
1 October 1972	19,775
1 October 1973	19,997
1 October 1974	20,219
1 October 1975	20,377
1 October 1976	20,551
1 October 1977	20,796
1 October 1978	21,040
1 October 1979	21,357
1 October 1980	21,812
1 October 1981	22,304
1 October 1982	22,786
1 October 1983	23,254
1 October 1984	23,640
1 October 1985	24,035
1 October 1986	24,460
1 October 1987	24,922

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what prior consultations were held with the medical profession before the publication of the new contract proposals for doctors in general practice.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I remember the need for a more performance-related contract for GPs being a widespread subject of discussion with members of the medical profession about six or seven years ago. The need for a new

contract for general medical practitioners was first set out formally by the Government in the Green Paper "Primary Health Care: An Agenda for Discussion", published in April 1986. Eight months public consultation with the medical profession resulted in the proposals for a new contract set out in the White Paper "Promoting Better Health" published in November 1987.

Detailed discussions of the proposed new contract with the general medical services committee, which negotiates for GPs, began in March 1988. Between March 1988 and the publication by the GMSC of its account of the negotiating position and my publication of "A New Contract", my officials held 17 meetings lasting 80 hours with the GMSC. I also held two meetings personally with the negotiators before publication and a third, protracted one afterwards. Subsequent meetings between my officials and the GMSC have taken the total time spent on detailed negotiations past 100 hours.

The GMSC is now consulting its local medical committees and has summoned a conference for 27 April 1989. I wait to see whether it will wish to resume constructive discussions after the conference. In the meantime my officials are now preparing amendments to the regulations governing the GM services, including amendment to GPs' terms of service, and revised sections of the statement of fees and allowances (which sets out GPs' entitlement to those payments).

The new contract will not reduce the average remuneration of GPs. It will however result in good GPs —those who provide all the services that patients need, attract patients to their practices and achieve high levels of performance—being paid more. This will be achieved by redistribution of existing levels of remuneration enhanced by increased investment in the family practitioner services as promised in the White Paper "Promoting Better Health".

I believe that the GMSC agrees that the existing contract should be changed and that the changes should be introduced with effect from 1 April 1990. I hope, therefore, that the longest, most protracted, detailed and painstaking discussion of amendments to a contract in which I have ever been involved will soon come to an end. Both sides are agreed that our sole aim is to provide incentives to and fair reward for good quality primary health care and that publicly professed agreement should assist in any further discussions.

47. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make a statement on the response which he has received from general practitioners to his proposals for a new contract.

56. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received in the last 12 months on the subject of general practitioners' contracts.

57. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the British Medical Association's campaign against the proposed general practitioners' contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Since the publication of "General Practice in the NHS—A New Contract" on 23 February, I have received about 800 letters from individual GPs and their representative organisations. Prior to 23 February discussions on the GPs' contract with the GPs' representatives, the general medical service committee, were confidential.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in negotiations with the general medical services committee over a new contract for general practitioners since his publication of the Government's proposals on 23 February; and whether any of the outstanding issues have been settled.

48. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards settling general practitioners' contracts.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friends to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to my hon. Friends the Members for Fylde (Mr. Jack), for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) earlier today.

32. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to replace the General Medical Council with an independent body to investigate ethical complaints against general practitioners.

Mr. Freeman: The General Medical Council is an independent statutory body whose constitution and functions are regulated by the Medical Act 1983. Under this legislation the council has power to provide advice for members of the medical profession on standards of professional conduct and on medical ethics and to discipline doctors found guilty of serious professional misconduct. There are no plans to change existing arrangements.

26. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to make any amendments to the draft general practitioners' contract.

Mr. Mellor: The proposals set out in "A New Contract" are based on a year's intensive discussions with the general medical services committee negotiators. The principles are now settled but there will be plenty of opportunity to consider amendments to the detail as we proceed with the preparation of amendments to regulations and the statement of fees and allowances.

23. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposed level of capitation supplements in rural areas for rural general practitioner practices.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I propose that general practitioners should receive a rural capitation supplement to their basic practice allowance for each patient on their list who lives in a sparsely populated area. I envisaged three payments, the highest being for patients in the most sparsely populated areas. The amounts of these payments has not yet been decided.

Community Care

19. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he now expects to make a statement on his response to the Griffiths report.

21. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement about the Government's response to Sir Roy Griffiths' report "Agenda for Action".

Mr. Mellor: We remain committed to a policy of promoting the development of community services so that people can return to, or remain in, the community and live as independently as possible, wherever this is best for them. We are currently giving active consideration to the future organisation and management of community care following Sir Roy Griffiths' report and hope to be in a position to bring forward our own proposals in the near future.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received *(a)* generally in favour and *(b)* opposed to the main principles of the Griffiths report; and if he will now make a statement on the Government's intentions with regard to these recommendations.

Mr. Mellor: The representations we have received contain a wide and varied range of views on the Griffiths report. We shall take all reactions into account in framing our own proposals, which we hope to be in a position to bring forward in the near future.

64. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to introduce changes in the reorganisation and delivery of community care.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 6 April, at column *291*.

62. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase support services for carers.

Mr. Mellor: The Department has, for a number of years, grant-aided national voluntary organisations directly concerned with the needs of carers. In 1988-89 these grants totalled nearly £¼ million. Total grant-aid to the voluntary sector by the Department now exceeds £36 million per annum, a substantial proportion of which is directed at organisations providing services for sick, elderly and disabled people and their carers. I have recently approved a grant of £150,000 for a carers training project and we have provided funding of £19,000 for an information pack about carers' services to accompany a forthcoming BBC local radio series. Under our helping the community to care programme we have made available £10·2 million for projects to support people looking after sick, disabled and elderly people in the community, including £¼ million to the King's Fund informal caring support unit and £1·8 million to develop services for carers in three demonstration districts in Sandwell, Stockport and East Sussex. We are also funding a programme of research on carers at the university of York and have commissioned some further analysis of the carers data from the 1985 general household survey which, together with data emerging form the OPCS surveys of disability, will inform decisions about the future planning of community care policies.

44. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to meet the organisation MIND to discuss Sir Roy Griffiths' report on community care.

Mr. Mellor: We are currently giving active consideration to the future organisation and management of community care following Sir Roy Griffiths' report. We hope to be in a position to bring forward our proposals in the near future and will consider requests for meetings from the organisations involved at that stage.

Ladywell Hospital, Eccles

24. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will pay a visit to Ladywell hospital in Eccles.

Mr. Freeman: I have no plans to make such a visit in the near future.

Patients (Mixing)

27. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring is undertaken by his Department of the numbers of mixing of elderly physically frail patients and elderly mentally ill patients.

Mr. Freeman: It is departmental policy that there should be separate services for elderly physically frail patients and elderly mentally ill patients. But where elderly people have multiple disabilities they are likely to be in the sort of facility best placed to meet their major need. The provision of services is the responsibility of the district health authority concerned. Overall levels of provision are monitored through the regional review process and through the Health Advisory Service programme of visits.

Eyesight Testing

28. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he is giving to the introduction of a low-cost private eye test.

Mr. Mellor: We are presently considering comments from professional and other interested bodies on a proposal that in the case of private sight tests a patient, under certain circumstances, will be able to choose to have a vision only test to determine whether spectacles are required. No decision on the proposal has yet been reached.

68. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning his Department's proposals relating to sight testing.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 13 April to the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), at column *699*.

30. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health of he will make a statement on the levels of prices being charged for eyesight testing.

Mr. Mellor: Indications are that fees for private sight tests range between £7 and £15, though one chain of opticians is offering sight tests for old age pensioners at £2·50. Some opticians I understand who are charging about £10 are offering package deals which may give a discount on glasses if these are bought at the branch where the sight test takes place.

NHS (Private Laboratories)

29. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the consequences of the increasing use of private sector laboratory facilities within the National Health Service.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) on 21 March 1989, at column *893*.

Nurses

31. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses there are at present; and how many there were in 1979.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) on 21 March, at column *567*.

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to encourage the private health care sector to increase its contribution to nurse training.

Mr. Mellor: I am pleased to announce that representatives of the private sector, the English National Board and the Department have recently established a joint working group to identify the extent of the private sector's capacity to participate in pre-registration nurse training. The group will also identify the sector's demand for post-registration nurses and its capacity to provide an input consistent with its capacity to train, and its demand for, staff.

GP Drug Lists

34. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policies for general practitioner drug lists.

50. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's policy towards general practitioner drug lists.

Mr. Mellor: We are encouraging the continued development of voluntary local formularies (locally agreed lists of drugs which would normally be prescribed in the majority of cases) as a means of achieving more effective and economical prescribing by general medical practitioners. Formularies might cover a single practice, a group of practices or a family practitioner committee area. As we stated in working paper number 4, "Indicative Prescribing Budgets for General Medical Practitioners", it will be a responsibility of regional health authorities to encourage the development of joint formularies between FPCs and district health authorities.

West Midlands RHA

36. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority; and whether the question of hospital trusts was discussed.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State last met the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority, together with the chairmen of all other regional health authorities, on 14 and 15 March. NHS hospital trusts were among the many questions that we discussed.

Asset Registers

37. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what practical and financial assistance he proposes to offer to health authorities in the compilation of asset registers.

Mr. Freeman: Health authorities have been given details of the pilot studies of asset recording as noted in paragraph 4.2 of working paper No. 5 "Capital Charges" together with details of asset register software which is available to them free of charge. The Department is forming a capital charges unit, headed by an experienced and professionally qualified financial manager seconded from the NHS, which will be available to advise authorities.

Speech Therapists

38. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the extent of control over professional and budgetary matters available to speech therapists under the White Paper "Working for Patients" proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The White Paper proposals apply to all branches of the professional services delivered by the National Health Service. The question is too vague to permit any precise answer at this stage.

Health Authorities (Insurance)

39. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards enabling health authorities to insure themselves against risk.

Mr. Mellor: Health authorities follow the practice of Government Departments, which normally do not insure unless it would be more economical for them to do so than to carry the risks themselves. This long-standing arrangement is something authorities take into account in deciding what provision for contingencies should be made in their financial plans.

Waiting List Fund

40. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources have been allocated for 1989-90 to the waiting list fund; and of this what proportion will be allocated direct to regional health authorities.

Mr. Mellor: The sum of £31 million will be made available through the waiting list fund in 1989-90. Of this, £25·3 million has already been allocated to regional and special health authorities to fund projects aimed at reducing the time patients have to wait for hospital treatment. The remaining £5·7 million will be targeted, through regions, at health districts with particular waiting problems.

Acute Hospital Beds (West Midlands)

42. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute hospital beds there are in the West Midlands regional health authority and how many there were in 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table. The number of in-patient cases treated per available bed has increased from 28 in 1979 to 42 in the financial year 1987-88.

Average daily available acute beds, West Midlands regional health authority, 1979 and 1987-88

	Available beds	*In-patient cases treated*
1979	14,669	414,865
1987-88	13,179	550,698

Source: SH3: 1979.
KH03: 1987-88.

Prepared Foods

43. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the regulations governing the preparation and distribution of the products of the prepared food industry; and if, as a matter of urgency, he will discuss this with representatives of the industry.

Mr. Freeman: The provision of the Food Act 1984, together with the food hygiene regulations, made the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970 and the Food Hygiene (Markets, Stalls and Delivery Vehicles) Regulations 1966, as amended, apply to the preparation and distribution of food products. The wider application of storage temperature controls in the food hygiene regulations, including those required for delivery vehicles, is currently being considered and revised draft regulations will be issued for consultation shortly. Food industry concerns will be included in this exercise.

Prescriptions

46. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to modify the costs of prescriptions for those with incomes above income support level.

Mr. Mellor: The Government have maintained the wide-ranging exemptions from prescription charges under which more than 75 per cent. of all items dispensed in the NHS are free of charge as well as continuing to provide pre-payment certificates for persons who are not exempt but who need frequent medication.

Hospital Pharmacists

49. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in recruiting more hospital pharmacists.

Mr. Mellor: Recruitment of hospital pharmacists is a matter for individual health authorities.

NHS (Privatisation)

51. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans for privatising the National Health Service.

53. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to privatise the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No, and I never have had any such plans.

Family Care

52. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much on average is being spent in the current year on each family from the current health budget; and how much is planned for each of the three subsequent years.

Mr. Freeman: Average gross NHS spending (current and capital) per head in England will be £442 this year (1989-90) and is planned to be £461 in 1990-91 and £479 in 1991-92. If the average family is considered to consist of four persons the average spending per family will be £1,767 this year and £1,845 and £1,917 in each of the following two years respectively. Planned expenditure figures for future years are subject to further consideration in future public expenditure surveys. The level of planned spending on the NHS for 1992-93 has not yet been decided.

Nursing Homes

54. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms exist to safeguard the interests of elderly residents of residential and nursing homes.

Mr. Mellor: The Registered Homes Act 1984 and associated regulations place the responsibility on local authorities and district health authorities as registering authorities to register private and voluntary residential care homes and nursing homes respectively and inspect them at least twice a year; the inspections may be unannounced and "out of hours". In addition, general guidance on the running of these homes is available in "Home Life" a code of practice for residential care, and the National Association of Health Authorities' "Handbook on Registration and Inspection of Nursing Homes", and in departmental guidance. Local authorities are also responsible for ensuring adequate standards in their own homes. The Department's social services inspectorate monitors and advises local authorities on the discharge of their duties.

Hospitals (Opting Out)

55. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of district health authorities in the north-west expressing an interest in hospitals opting-out.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is too early to do so. Mr. Duncan Nichol, the chief executive of the National Health Service, has asked for outline expressions of interest relating to proposals for self-governing hospitals within the NHS to come to my Department through RHAs, by 31 May.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now withdraw his proposals for the opting-out of hospitals from the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) earlier today.

Smoking

58. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policy his Department has adopted in regard to smoking in departmental offices.

Mr. Mellor: The Department's policy has been under review and management and representatives of staff have discussed the introduction of a reviewed policy in line with the Health Education guidelines "Smoking Policies at Work" (ISBN 090365251X). On the basis of these discussions we will be moving towards a no smoking working environment by agreement in the Department's offices.

Health Districts (Treatment Costs)

60. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the variations in cost of treatment between different health districts.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) by my right hon. and learned Friend on 21 March 1989, at columns *562-63*.

Drug Costs

61. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to take account in the analysis made of family doctors' drug costs of the savings in hospital treatment costs.

Mr. Mellor: Any analysis made of drug costs incurred by a general medical practice takes account of the reason for the prescribing pattern of that practice. This might include arrangements to treat patients with drug therapy in the community in preference to hospital treatment.

Doctors

63. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors there are, and how many there were in 1979.

Mr. Mellor: In 1979 there were 60,764 doctors in the hospital and community health and family practitioner services in England. By 1987 the number was 68,777.

NHS (Contracting-out)

67. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he can give an estimate of the savings made in the last available year from the contracting out of services within the National Health Service.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply on 21 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), at column *564*.

Clinical Efficiency

69. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received copies of the COHSE document on clinical efficiency.

Mr. Mellor: Yes.

Clinical Audit

70. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has received from trade unions on the development of clinical audit.

Mr. Mellor: Comments on the development of clinical audit have been received from the British Medical Association, the general medical services committee, the Royal College of Nursing and the Confederation of Health Service Employees.

Hearing Aid Services

71. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the case for improving hearing aid services.

Mr. Mellor: We are continuing to receive a wide range of views on the provision of hearing aid services following the launch of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf's "Fair Hearing" campaign. The Department is giving careful consideration to all suggestions for change in examining the available options.

Listeria

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will initiate additional scientific research into the epidemiology of listeriosis and the behaviour of its causative organism and as to whether the current statutory HTST milk pasteurisation temperature is fully effective in the destruction of listeria monocytogenes.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will consider carefully any proposals to study the epidemiological risk factors (with particular reference to food) for the development of listeriosis. The behaviour of the causative organism has already been studied by the public health laboratory service and Camden Food Research Association, which were Government funded for this work. There is general international consensus that the HTST milk pasteurisation temperature and time requirements of 71·7°C for 15 seconds in the existing regulations is fully effective in the destruction of listeria monocytogenes.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish a microbiological standard for listeria in foods.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government have established a committee chaired by Sir Mark Richmond to advise them on the microbiological safety of food. The work of the committee will include consideration of listeria. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I will consider its recommendations on this and all related subjects as and when they are available.

Cook-chill Food

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce statutory control of cook-chill methods of food production, storage and display for sale.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The present food hygiene regulations cover all food business including those handling cook-chill foods. These are currently under review and we expect to be consulting on draft amending regulations in the near future.

Legionnaire's Disease (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the outbreak of legionnaire's disease at the Queen's medical centre, Nottingham.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is aware of the outbreak and is satisfied that effective measures are being taken urgently to trace the source of infection.

Offerton House, Stockport

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the report of the town planning consultant who is examining the alternative uses of Offerton house, Stockport.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that the Stockport health authority which commissioned the report, has no plans at present to send it to me.

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many former patients of Offerton house, Stockport, are taking part in the care in the community scheme; and how many have since returned to Offerton house.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that 30 patients have been discharged from Offerton house and none has returned.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the main reasons for food poisoning outbreaks according to his departmental research; and how many of these relate to temperature control.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not hold figures centrally on the reasons for reported outbreaks of food poisoning. Studies on a number of food poisoning outbreaks reported between 1970 and 1982 showed that inadequate temperature control was the main factor contributing to the growth of food poisoning organisms in food, but the problem can arise at any stage from production to consumption.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of food poisoning outbreaks were attributed to *(a)* catering type establishments, *(b)* retail, *(c)* home and *(d)* others in the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: the table shows the number of outbreaks of bacterial food poisoning and salmonella infection reported from 1979 to 1986 (the last year for which figures are currently available).

Outbreaks of bacterial food poisoning and salmonella infection by location

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	[1]1986
Private Homes	325	297	410	467	439	367	259	326
Restaurants/receptions	99	89	88	70	96	94	64	71
Hospitals	37	37	24	39	37	37	36	33
Institutions	20	17	11	28	25	13	19	19
Schools	13	10	9	9	5	7	8	8
Shops	12	5	17	5	15	10	5	4
Canteens	11	10	12	15	13	16	10	9
Farms	8	8	—	16	6	9	3	2
Infected abroad	7	5	—	4	7	14	9	12
Other	2	9	69	23	23	20	24	18
Unspecified		31		26	27	52	26	14
TOTAL	534	518	640	702	693	639	463	516

[1]Provisional.

Source:
PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre.

Note:
The data relates to the place where the outbreaks occurred; no information is held on where the food was prepared.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* salmonella, *(b)* campylobactor and *(c)* listeria outbreaks were reported in each year since 1979; and what estimate he has of the level of unreported outbreaks.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is available until 1987 and is as follows.

Reports of outbreaks of salmonellosis, food and water borne campylobacter enteritis and listeriosis since 1979[1].

Year	Number of outbreaks: Salmonellosis	Food and water borne Campylobacter enteritis	Listeriosis
1979	[2]455	[3]	—
1980	[2]439	[3]	—
1981	568	[3]	1
1982	612	[3]	—
1983	594	[3]	—
1984	540	24	—
1985	372	25	—
1986	269	15	—
1987	294	18	—

Notes:
[1]Reported to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre.
[2]Reports from PHLS and hospital laboratories only.
[3]Information not available.

I am unable to estimate the level of unreported outbreaks.

Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital (Radiation)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the delay in reaching agreement on a cash settlement for patients damaged by excessive radiation in 1988 at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement in the Adjournment debate on 6 April 1989, at columns 468-70.

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Freeman: None that I am aware of.

Ambulance Personnel (Sunderland)

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the number of ambulance personnel employed at the Sunderland ambulance station, *(b)* the number of ambulance personnel who have died from coronary attacks and related conditions while so employed and *(c)* the number of ambulance personnel who have retired from service due to heart conditions and related illnesses, showing each category year by year since 1985.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Northern regional health authority.

Stomach Cancer

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill, of 9 March, *Official Report*, columns *585-86*, whether his Department will conduct statistical tests on the rates of stomach cancer per 100,000 population for the figures he gave; and what assessment has been made of the causes of the differences between the rates for Liverpool and Warrington district health authorities and the national mean.

Mr. Freeman: I believe the hon. Member is referring to figures given in my answer to him of 15 March, at columns *233-34*. There is a statistically significant difference between the rates for Liverpool, but not for Warrington, and the national average. It is a matter for health authorities in the first instance to monitor and investigate information on the incidence of disease as part of their responsibility for the planning and delivery of services.

Lung Disease (Miners)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of working miners were diagnosed as suffering from lung disease in each of the years *(a)* 1959, *(b)* 1961, *(c)* 1966, *(d)* 1971, *(e)* 1976, *(f)* 1981, *(g)* 1986 and *(h)* 1988; and what was the average incidence in the country as a whole.

Mr. Freeman: Information about numbers of working miners with lung disease or incidence of lung disease in the population as a whole is not collected centrally. The annual report of the Health and Safety Commission in its tables of cases of occupational diseases awarded benefit includes figures on occupational lung diseases. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Midwives

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, in the Leeds western health authority *(a)* what was the average increase in midwives' pay following the recent regrading, *(b)* how many midwives received increases of £2,000 or more and *(c)* how many midwives are employed on the F grade, E grade and D grade.

Mr. Mellor: We hold no information centrally on average pay increases for groups of staff within an individual district health authority, or on the numbers of staff within a district who received increases of a given amount.

The only information we hold here on the results of clinical regrading at district level relates to the assimilation at 1 April 1988 from old grades to new. This information has already been placed in the Library.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to introduce an appeal procedure for student midwives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Midwifery students already have a right of appeal under a long-standing agreement between the management and trades union sides of the General Whitley council on procedures for settling differences over NHS employees' conditions of service.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of home delivery training is given to trainee midwives in the Trent regional health authority; and what is the percentage nationally.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this infomation centrally. I suggest the hon. Member writes to the chairman of the Trent regional health authority for the information he seeks.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Grand National

Mr Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations, and from whom, he has received about the deaths of horses at the current year's Grand National meeting at Aintree racecourse.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has received one from an hon. Friend and 14 from members of the public.

Police Rent Allowance

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* in tablular form details for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available of the total pay bill, compensatory grant received and income tax paid by each police authority in England and Wales in respect of police officers' rent allowance.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Expenditure incurred by police authorities in England and Wales on salaries for police officers in 1987-88 is shown in the table. The figures for allowances include compensatory grant payments but it is not possible to identify such payments separately.

£ million

	Salaries[1]	*Allowances*	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	45,719	7,801	53,520
Bedfordshire	15,727	2,523	18,250
Cambridgeshire	17,691	2,536	20,227
Cheshire	28,239	4,642	32,881
Cleveland	22,567	4,332	26,899
Cumbria	17,797	2,249	20,046
Derbyshire	27,485	4,592	32,077
Devon and Cornwall	43,769	7,733	51,502
Dorset	18,790	3,163	21,953
Durham	20,422	3,022	23,444
Dyfed-Powys	13,924	1,839	15,763
Essex	43,246	8,794	52,040
Gloucestershire	17,265	3,123	20,388
Greater Manchester	106,342	15,977	122,319
Gwent	15,172	2,411	17,583
Hampshire	49,364	8,633	57,997
Hertfordshire	24,760	3,724	28,484
Humberside	30,630	5,454	36,084
Kent	48,454	8,313	56,767
Lancashire	49,173	6,637	55,810
Leicestershire	26,921	4,981	31,902
Lincolnshire	18,641	3,014	21,655
Merseyside	74,855	13,066	87,921
Norfolk	20,764	3,584	24,348
Northamptonshire	16,898	2,513	19,411
Northumbria	54,245	8,201	62,446
North Wales	19,825	2,621	22,446
North Yorkshire	20,550	2,561	23,111
Nottinghamshire	32,661	5,844	38,505
South Wales	46,005	8,603	54,608
South Yorkshire	44,876	7,512	52,388
Staffordshire	32,702	4,872	37,574

	Salaries[1]	Allowances	Total
Suffolk	18,287	2,987	21,274
Surrey	25,961	3,965	29,926
Sussex	43,266	6,651	49,917
Thames Valley	56,679	10,124	66,803
Warwickshire	15,338	2,675	18,013
West Mercia	29,994	4,614	34,608
West Midlands	106,742	15,659	122,401
West Yorkshire	79,035	13,603	92,638
Wiltshire	17,160	2,952	20,112
City of London	14,390	2,457	16,847
Metropolitan	503,180	84,328	587,508
TOTAL	1,975,511	324,885	2,300,396

[1] Includes National Insurance.

Prisoners (Rule 43)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are serving sentences under the protection of rule 43; and what is the percentage in relation to the numbers of prisoners, by prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Statistics of prisoners on rule 43 have hitherto been collected centrally only in relation to adult males and the latest figures available are as at 31 December 1988. The information available is set out in the table. The percentages relate to the total sentenced adult male population at each establishment.

Establishment	Sentenced adult males at 31 December 1988 Number on Rule 43 (own protection)	Percentage of total
North Region		
Acklington	0	—
Durham	112	15·7
Frankland	40	10·1
Full Sutton	13	5·1
Garth	0	—
Haverigg	2	0·7
Hull	53	22·2
Kirkham	0	—
Lancaster	0	—
Leeds	144	27·1
Lindholme	3	0·4
Liverpool	165	13·4
Manchester	93	10·8
Preston	4	1·2
Risley	0	—
Rudgate	0	—
Thorp Arch	0	—
Wakefield	31	4·2
Wymott	1	0·3
	661	
South West Region		
Bristol	36	9·5
Cardiff	28	5·1
Channings Wood	4	0·8
Dartmoor	27	4·3
Dorchester	5	6·0
Erlestoke House	0	—
Exeter	29	14·2
Gloucester	14	7·1
Grendon	55	27·1
Leyhill	0	—
Long Lartin	10	2·5
Oxford	8	6·4
Pucklechurch	0	—
Reading	6	4·8
Shepton Mallet	1	0·4
Swansea	29	9·9
The Verne	0	—
Winchester	60	20·5
	312	
Midland Region		
Asgwell	2	0·5
Bedford	6	5·5
Birmingham	34	6·1
Featherstone	0	—
Gartree	17	5·5
Leicester	43	21·2
Lincoln	88	26·8
Littlehey	0	—
Morton Hall	0	—
North Sea Camp	0	—
Nottingham	1	0·3
Ranby	2	0·6
Shrewsbury	23	11·9
Stafford	45	5·6
Stocken	2	0·7
Sudbury	0	—
	263	
South East Region		
Albany	2	0·5
Aldington	0	—
Blantyre House	0	—
Blundeston	4	1·0
Brixton	44	24·2
Camp Hill	23	4·7
Canterbury	28	28·9
Chelmsford	11	11·4
Coldingley	0	—
Ford	0	—
Highpoint	0	—
Kingston	0	—
Latchmere House	0	—
Lewes	15	6·0
Maidstone	2	0·4
Northeye	8	3·4
Norwich	59	15·3
Parkhurst	12	5·1
Pentonville	45	7·5
Rochester	0	—
Send	0	—
Standford Hill	0	—
Swaleside	7	1·8
Wandsworth	382	26·2
Wayland	3	0·6
Wormwood Scrubs	37	9·4
	682	

Police (Escort Duties)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has of the number of police who currently undertake escort duties of inmates from prison to courts; and what steps he is taking to encourage reallocation of this task.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In a report produced in July 1988, the police requirements support unit of the Home Office estimated, on the basis of a survey in four police areas, that the handling and escorting of prisoners to magistrates' courts cost the police in England and Wales more than £31 million per year. On the basis of the same report it has been estimated that approximately 1,000 officers per day are involved in this work.

As my right hon. Friend announced to the House on 1 March at columns *277-78* further work is in hand towards contracting out the escorting, custody and control of prisoners with the aim of relieving both the police and prison service of this task.

Crowd Control

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library any manual, advice or other paper produced by his Department or the Police Staff College at Bramshill or any other official body relating to the control of crowds outside sports stadia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Chapter 14 of the "Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds", HMSO, 1986, offers guidance on crowd control. Paragraph 205 emphasises that effective arrangements to counter crowd disorder outside the ground must also be made. A copy of the guide is in the Library.

The Association of Chief Police Officers issues to its members general guidance on the policing of football matches, part of which relates to policing outside stadia. Disclosure of such guidance is a matter for the association.

Civil Defence

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give details of any emergency duty system for firefighters that he has considered for use in the event of hostilities or a war emergency;

(2) what advice he has issued to chief fire officers concerning wartime or emergency duty systems for firefighters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Guidance on wartime duty systems is contained in fire service circular 6/1984, paragraph 17. Detailed arrangements would be for the individual fire authorities to decide in the light of circumstances at the time. No such guidance has been given in relation to peacetime emergencies.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for determining the eligibility for civil defence grant aid of local authority emergency centre proposals.

Mr. John Patten: Relevant statutory provisions are contained in the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1983 (SI 1983/1634) and the Civil Defence (Grant) Regulations 1953 (SI 1953/1777) as amended. Proposals for such emergency centres should be in accordance with the guidance contained in the "Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities", a copy of which is in the Library. In particular, information on the minimum standards for emergency centres is set out in annex D of section 4 of the EPGLA and on eligibility for grant aid in section 19.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those county and fire and civil defence authorities that had had message switch equipment installed in their emergency centres by 31 December 1988; and if he will list those county and fire and civil defence authorities that were expected to receive such equipment during the current year.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is as follows:

County and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities (FCDAs) in England and Wales which had received message switch equipment by 31 December 1988:

Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cleveland, Cornwall, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Devon, Dorset, Durham, Essex, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Humberside, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, North Yorkshire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk, West Yorkshire FCDA, Wiltshire.

County and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities (FCDAs) in England and Wales which have received or are expected to receive the equipment during the year to 31 December 1989:

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Clwyd, Dyfed, East Sussex, Greater Manchester FCDA, Gwynedd, Hampshire (to complete), Hereford and Worcester, Isle of Wight, Kent, London FCDA, Oxfordshire, Powys, Shropshire, South Glamorgan, Staffordshire (to complete), Surrey, Tyne and Wear FCDA, Warwickshire, West Glamorgan, West Midlands FCDA, West Sussex.

Some revisions and additions to the above list can be expected in the light of site availability, following discussion with the authorities concerned.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those district authorities that had had message switch equipment installed in their emergency centres by 31 December 1988: and if he will list those district authorities that were expected to receive such equipment during the current year.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is as follows:

District/Borough Authorities in England and Wales which had received message switch equipment by 31 December 1988

County	*District/Borough*
Bedfordshire	Luton, Mid Bedfordshire, North Bedfordshire, South Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire	Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdon, South Cambridgeshire
Cheshire	Vale Royal
Cleveland	Middlesborough, Stockton on Tees
Cornwall	Caradon, North Cornwall, Penwith
Cumbria	Allerdale, Barrow in Furness, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden
Derbyshire	Chesterfield, High Peak, West Derbyshire
Devon	East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, Plymouth, Teignbridge, Torbay
Dorset	Bournemouth, Christchurch, East Dorset, Poole, Purbeck, West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland
Durham	Chester le Street, Derwentside, Durham, Easington, Teesdale
Essex	Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea, Tendring, Thurrock, Uttlesford
Gloucestershire	Cheltenham, Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Tewkesbury
Hampshire	New Forest, Winchester
Hertfordshire	East Hertfordshire, St. Albans
Humberside	Beverley, Cleethorpes, East Yorkshire, Glanford, Great Grimsby

County	District/Borough
Lancashire	Blackburn, Blackpool, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster, Pendle, Preston, Ribble Valley, Rossendale, South Ribble, West Lancashire, Wyre
Leicestershire	Blaby, Harborough, Hinckley and Bosworth, Leicester, Melton, Rutland
Lincolnshire	Lincoln, North Kesteven, South Kesteven
Norfolk	Breckland, Great Yarmouth
Northamptonshire	Daventry, Northampton, Wellingborough
North Yorkshire	Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Scarborough, Selby
Northumberland	Alnwick, Tynedale
Nottinghamshire	Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark, Nottingham
Somerset	Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Taunton Deane
Staffordshire	East Staffordshire, South Staffordshire
Suffolk	Babergh, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, St Edmundsbury
West Yorkshire	Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees
Wiltshire	Kennet, North Wiltshire, Salisbury, West Wiltshire

District/Borough Authorities in England and Wales which have received or are expected to receive the equipment during the year to 31 December 1989

County	District/Borough
Berkshire	Bracknell, Newbury, Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead
Buckinghamshire	Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, Milton Keynes, South Buckinghamshire, Wycombe
Clwyd	Colwyn
Dyfed	Carmarthen, Llanelli
East Sussex	Brighton, Hove, Lewes, Rother, Wealden
Greater Manchester	Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Salford, Stockport, Trafford
Gwynedd	Aberconwy, Ynys Mon
Hampshire	Basingstoke and Dene, Eastleigh, Fareham, Hart, Havant, Portsmouth, Rushmoor, Southampton, Test Valley
Hereford and Worcester	Leominster, Redditch, Worcester, Wyre Forest
Kent	Dover, Gillingham, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale, Thanet, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells
London	Barnet, Brent, Camden, City of London, Ealing, Enfield, Harringey, Harrow, Havering, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston upon Thames, Newham, Redbridge, Richmond upon Thames
Oxfordshire	Cherwell, Oxford, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire
Powys	Brecknock, Radnor
Shropshire	Shrewsbury and Atcham, South Shropshire
South Glamorgan	Cardiff
Staffordshire	Lichfield, Staffordshire Moorlands
Surrey	Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley, Woking
Tyne and Wear	North Tyneside, Sunderland
Warwickshire	Rugby, Stratford on Avon
West Midlands	Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Wolverhampton
West Sussex	Adur, Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, Mid Sussex

In a few cases, equipment for the above districts has been accommodated elsewhere pending completion of site preparations. Also, some revisions and additions to the list can be expected in the light of site availability following discussions with the authorities concerned.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the emergency planning communications handbook will be published; when the proposed circular on wartime communications will be published; when the guide to message writing being drafted by the ad hoc working party on emergency communications will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The emergency planning guidance handbook on communications and the guide to message writing are due to be published later this year.

Consideration is being given to the need for a circular to update existing references to emergency communications provision and associated arrangements for grant aid. Any such circular is unlikely to be issued before next year.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the written reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) of 7 December 1988, *Official Report*, columns *204-5*, (1) how many of the 35 emergency planning officers and 10 administrative and support staff employed by district authorities are wholly funded by his Department's civil defence grant;

(2) if he will list those district authorities which employ the 35 emergency planning officers and 10 administrative and support staff which are wholly or partly funded by Home Office civil defence grant.

Mr. John Patten: The aggregate figures quoted in the earlier reply derive from the employment of 22 full-time emergency planning officers, four full-time administrative and support staff and a number of part time staff in each category. The full-time posts are wholly funded by civil defence grant.

The districts which employ these staff are as follows:

Avon
Wansdyke

Buckinghamshire
Aylesbury Vale
South Buckinghamshire
Chiltern
Milton Keynes
Wycombe

Cambridgeshire
East Cambridgeshire

Cheshire
Congleton

Essex
Braintree
Southend

Brentwood	Tendring
Chelmsford	Uttlesford
Epping Forest	
Isle of Wight	
Medina	South Wight
Kent	
Canterbury	Gravesham
Dartford	Sevenoaks
Dover	
Norfolk	
Broadland	South Norfolk
Breckland	West Norfolk
North Norfolk	
Oxfordshire	
Cherwell	West Oxford
South Oxford	Vale of White Horse
Suffolk	
Babergh	Suffolk Coastal
St. Edmundsbury	
East Sussex	
Eastbourne	Rother
Hove	Wealden
Lewes	
West Sussex	
Adur	Horsham
Arun	Mid Sussex
Chichester	Worthing

Communications

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there are any plans to hold further exercises of communications similar to the COMTEST 89 exercise held on 12 January; if he has had any representations about the lack of translation capability for non-European languages highlighted by the COMTEST exercise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: COMTEST'89 was arranged by the Association of Chief Police Officers and funded by the Home Office. I understand a report on the exercise is now being drawn up and while we shall consider it carefully, it will be for ACPO to consider the operational implications and to take any decisions on the need for further exercises. No representations have been received about language problems.

Civil Defence College, Easingwold

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of expenditure on building maintenance at the civil defence college, Easingwold for each year from 1979 to the present time.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is as follows:

Year[1]	*£*
1979-80	34,049
1980-81	47,858
1981-82	83,032
1982-83	32,037
1983-84	34,094
1984-85	42,276
1985-86	59,763
1986-87	75,482
1987-88	200,190
1988-89	165,284

[1] (1 April—31 March).

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of capital expenditure on building improvements and extensions at the civil defence college, Easingwold for each year from 1979 to the present time.

Mr. John Patten: Details of capital expenditure in the years 1979-1984 are not available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The information for subsequent years is as follows:

Year[1]	*Minor works* *£*	*Major works* *£*
1984-85	27,082	—
1985-86	12,765	—
1986-87	29,538	—
1987-88	60,854	—
1988-89	47,714	—

[1] (1 April—31 March).

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give current valuations for *(a)* the buildings, *(b)* the furniture, fixtures and fittings and *(c)* the land at the civil defence college, Easingwold.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms Expert Consultative Committee

Mr. Martin Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will appoint a chairman to the firearms expert consultative committee set up under the provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Act.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 13 April at column *718*.

Police (Ports)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each port in England and Wales at which police including special branch officers, are stationed either on a full-time or part-time basis the following information: *(a)* the name of the relevant police force, *(b)* the number of full-time equivalent police officers stationed there or the number of police man hours, *(c)* the total direct costs associated with policing each port, *(d)* the total indirect costs associated with policing each port and *(e)* the amount of money provided to each police force in respect of policing each port.

Mr. Hurd: Special branch offices are stationed on a full-time basis at those seaports and airports in England and Wales which are designated under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. In addition, uniformed police are stationed on a full-time basis at those airports in England and Wales which are designated under the Aviation Security Act 1982. The table shows which police force is responsible for the policing of each of the ports designated under these statutes. Police are also present on an ad hoc basis at a number of other ports in England and Wales.

The cost falls to the appropriate police authority and comes within the normal police funding arrangements. Under these arrangements the Home Office meets 51 per cent. of whatever a police authority spends on policing and

an additional contribution is made from central Government funds by way of block grant. It would not be right in the interests of national security to publish information about numbers of officers, police man hours, or the costs associated with the policing of individual ports.

Information is not held centrally for sea ports whose owners appoint their own constables under local and private legislation and where costs are met by the harbour authorities.

Designated Ports under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989

	Force Area
Seaports	
Fishguard	Dyfed-Powys
Fleetwood	Lancashire
Heysham	Lancashire
Holyhead	North Wales
Pembroke Dock	Dyfed-Powys
Plymouth	Devon and Cornwall
Port of Liverpool	Merseyside
Poole Harbour	Dorset
Portsmouth Continental ferry port	Hampshire
Southampton	Hampshire
Swansea	South Wales
Torquay	Devon and Cornwall
Weymouth	Dorset
Airports	
Biggin Hill	Metropolitan
Birmingham[1]	West Midlands
Blackpool	Lancashire
Bournemouth (Hurn)	Dorset
Bristol	Avon and Somerset
Cambridge	Cambridgeshire
Cardiff	South Wales
Carlisle	Cumbria
Coventry	West Midlands
East Midlands	Leicestershire
Exeter	Devon and Cornwall
Gloucester/Cheltenham (Staverton)	Gloucestershire
Humberside	Humberside
Leeds/Bradford	West Yorkshire
Liverpool	Merseyside
London—City	Metropolitan
London—Gatwick[1]	Sussex
London—Heathrow[1]	Metropolitan
Luton	Bedfordshire
Lydd	Kent
Manchester[1]	Greater Manchester
Manston	Kent
Newcastle	Northumbria
Norwich	Norfolk
Plymouth	Devon and Cornwall
Southampton	Hampshire
Southend	Essex
Stansted[1]	Essex
Teeside	Durham

[1] Also designated under the Aviation Security Act 1982.

Courts

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has as to the annual number of court hours which are lost as a result of the non-delivery or late delivery of prisoners to court; and if he will make a statement as to the estimated cost.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not routinely collected. Where defendants do not appear it will often be possible to rearrange business so that court time is not lost. There is insufficient information on which to base an estimate of cost.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent examination he has made of the reasons for delays in courts trying cases down for hearing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are carrying out a survey of the reasons for adjournments in cases before magistrates courts. A range of courts will take part in the survey in the last week in April.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has to the annual number of *(a)* magistrates court, *(b)* Crown court and central criminal court cases which are delayed or postponed as a result of the non-delivery of the defendant to the court by the police or prison service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not routinely collected. We expect to obtain information relating to cases postponed in a sample of magistrates courts from our forthcoming survey of reasons for adjournments.

Police (Prisoners)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give for each police force area the average number of police officers involved each day in the transport of prisoners to and from court; and what percentage of the average daily manpower of each force this represents;

(2) if he will give for each police force the daily and yearly cost of providing transport for prisoners to and from court.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today to a question from the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for the information which is available.

Firearms (Police)

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many operations firearms were issued to police officers in England and Wales in 1988; in how many of those operations shots were fired by police officers; how many police officers are currently qualified to carry firearms; and what were the equivalent figures for each of the previous five years.

Mr. Hurd: Information relating to the police use of firearms in operations against criminals or others known or believed to be armed in the years in question is given in the table.

Year	*Number of operations*	*Number of times shots fired*	*Number of authorised firearms officers*
1983	3,180	3	13,044
1984	2,667	6	11,873
1985	2,488	7	10,244
1986	2,453	1	8,395
1987	2,185	7	7,349
1988	2,227	2	7,194

These figures show that over five years the police have been issuing and using firearms less often. The figures

show the continuing determination of the Government and of chief officers of police that the police use of firearms should remain a measure of the last resort, and that traditional methods of policing should continue.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Services Agency

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 8 March to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, *Official Report*, column *521*, on what basis he determined in 1986 that the Property Services Agency site at Falmouth avenue, Newmarket, was too small to be redeveloped to accommodate civil servants located in Cambridge; and what was, and is, the average number of square feet he requires per civil servant doing the type of work in which the Property Services Agency is engaged in its Cambridge and Newmarket offices.

Mr. Chope: On the basis that the site of 1·21 acres could not be developed to provide the office space and parking facilities necessary for an establishment of some 400 staff.

Rates

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will make a statement about the level of rate increases in Greater London.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The average rise in domestic rate poundages in 1989-90 for the London boroughs and the City is 9·9 per cent., slightly above the national average.

The average masks a wide range of changes. In the six rate-capped authorities in London the average domestic rate poundage has decreased by 4·7 per cent. In Conservative boroughs the average rise is 7·6 per cent., compared wth 21·6 per cent. in those Labour boroughs which are not rate capped.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the total rate in the pound payable by a resident in the London boroughs of *(a)* Lambeth, *(b)* Camden, *(c)* Islington, *(d)* Southwark, *(e)* Brent and *(f)* Haringey, including Greater London council, Inner London education authority and other precepts where appropriate, and the district of Taunton Deane, Somerset, in the years 1980-81, 1984-85, 1986-87 and 1989-90.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The total rate in the pound, payable by a resident in the authorities listed for the years specified, is as follows:

Domestic Rate Poundage (P)

	1980-81	*1984-85*	*1986-87*	*1989-90*
Lambeth	145·4	233·1	217·2	202·6
Camden	118·4	202·7	209·4	210·7
Islington	117·9	233·5	184·3	224·4
Southwark	118·0	260·5	212·2	193·5
Brent	109·5	223·5	223·5	344·5
Haringey	131·5	259·3	267·8	363·4
Taunton Deane	104·4	140·7	186·8	247·7

Rateable Values

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of business premises taken from the recent Inland Revenue sample survey will have a rateable value between £1,000 and £7,500 in London and between £1,000 and £5,000 elsewhere in England; and what percentage of business premises will have a new rateable value between £7,500 and £22,500 in London and between £5,000 and £15,000 elsewhere in England.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is estimated that nearly half the properties covered by the Inland Revenue survey will have a new rateable value from 1 April 1990 of between £1,000 and £7,500 in London and between £1,000 and £5,000 elsewhere in England. Slightly more than a quarter of properties will have a new rateable value of between £7,500 and £22,500 in London, and slightly less than a quarter between £5,000 and £15,000 elsewhere in England.

This information is based on a sample survey of the effects of the revaluation of non-domestic properties and the introduction of a uniform business rate. The new valuations supplied for the sample of properties were best estimates, not actual revaluations. The results must therefore be treated with caution.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many executive officers, higher executive officers, senior executive officers and grade 7 (administration) staff were in post in the Crown Suppliers on 1 April.

Mr. Ridley: The number of executive staff in post in the Crown Suppliers on 1 April 1989 was as follows:

	Number
Executive Officers	111
Higher Executive Officers	52
Senior Executive Officers	23
Grade 7 (administrative)	14

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average length of tour in the Crown Suppliers of executive grades.

Mr. Ridley: My Department has no recognised average length of tour in the Crown Suppliers for any grade of staff.

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many executive staff, namely, executive officers, HEOs, SEOs and grade 7 (administration) have since 1 April 1988 *(a)* transferred from other parts of the Civil Service into those areas of the Crown Suppliers intended for sale and *(b)* been posted in following direct recruitment into the Civil Service.

Mr. Ridley: Since 1 April 1988, three executive staff have transferred from other parts of the Civil Service into those areas of the Crown Suppliers intended for sale; and two administrative officers already in the Crown Suppliers have gained executive appointments in those areas through an open competition for recruitment into the Civil Service.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the criteria he will apply in deciding to whom to sell the Crown Suppliers should appropriate legislation be obtained.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* No decisions have yet been taken upon the detailed criteria which will apply.

Defective Housing

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional housing investment programme allocation he has made in respect of *(a)* the Galleys Bank estate in Kidsgrove and *(b)* the Park Lane estate in Biddulph, in respect of problems concerning defective housing; what is the average allocation per affected dwelling in each estate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Additional housing investment programme allocations of £389,000 and £690,000 were notified to Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire, Moorlands councils respectively to help them meet their housing defects obligations. These allocations are not made for specific estates or properties; it is for authorities to decide how to use them, together with their initial allocations and any other resources they have available.

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has reached a decision on proposals to amend the housing defects provisions following consultations with interested bodies.

Mr. Trippier: Yes. In the light of helpful comments from local authority associations, home owners groups and other interested bodies, we have decided to introduce certain amendments in the current Local Government and Housing Bill. This should help achieve a sound and practical streamlining of the housing defects scheme for the benefit of owners and local authorities alike. On the basis of consultations in Scotland, the Scottish Office proposes to introduce similar amendments to the parallel Scottish housing defects legislation.

The main proposal is for the taking down and reconstruction of an individual property, in an equivalent position, to be treated as reinstatement under the scheme so that grant-aid can be made available. Although somewhat less radical than our consultation suggestion, it would be more in line with Housing Defects Act reinstatement and, in certain circumstances, could offer a sensible and cost-effective alternative to reinstatement, provided that it is in accordance with the Act's other conditions. We also intend to bring eligible "shared owners" within the scheme by requiring local authorities to submit schemes for the Secretary of State's approval; and to allow the Secretary of State to extend the present two-month period for deciding local designations, where he needs more information.

We also propose a minor clarifying amendment to make it explicit that local authorities should decide owners' applications as soon as reasonably practicable.

We have decided at this time against the introduction of the proposed package of lifting Government-set limits on local authority reinstatement grants, with a revised degree of Exchequer contribution: consultees' responses generally favoured retaining existing controls, for the time being, to help ensure reinstatement is carried out cost effectively under the scheme.

Homelessness

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many units of accommodation his Department estimates were brought into letting for homeless households *(a)* in Greater London, *(b)* in the south-east outside London and *(c)* in England as a whole, through local authority schemes to give existing council tenants cash incentives to buy a property on the open market (i) in 1986-87, (ii) in 1987-88 and (iii) in 1988-89; and at what average cost.

Mr. Trippier: Regional and national estimates are not available. An exploratory research study of the majority of those Brent and Bromley tenants who received cash payments for home purchase in 1986 was published in May 1988 and a copy was placed in the Library. The department expects that the further studies of schemes in Taunton Deane, Southend and Croydon will be received shortly from the survey organisation.

Grants paid under section 129 of the Housing Act 1988 will be monitored for 1989-90 and subsequent years.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each scheme selected for an additional allocation of housing investment programme funds, under the homeless initiative promoted by his Department's Estate Action team *(a)* during 1987-88 and *(b)* during 1988-89; how many units of accommodation each scheme brought into use for homeless households; and whether each scheme provided permanent or temporary accommodation for homeless households; and what was the date of completion of each scheme.

Mr. Trippier: Additional allocations under the Estate Action homelessness initiative have been made for the following schemes in 1987-88 and 1988-89. According to information supplied by local authorities all schemes were completed within the financial year in question.

Local Authority	*Scheme*	*Number of units brought back into use*	*Permanent/ temporary accommodation*	*Allocation 1987/88 £*	*Allocation 1988/89 £*
Camden	Various	35	permanent	—	632,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	White City	56	permanent	349,000	—
Tower Hamlets	Ocean	20	permanent	126,000	516,000
Middlesbrough	Broughton Avenue	6	temporary	12,900	122,640
South Tyneside	Tyne Dock	16	permanent	55,000	—
Bradford	Woodside	14	permanent	37,000	—
Bradford	Pennington Terrace	22	permanent	—	533,564
Leeds	Gipton	10	permanent	200,000	—
Sheffield	Various	57	permanent	560,000	—
Wakefield	Airedale	16	permanent	90,000	—
York	Various	22	permanent	62,700	—
Nottingham	Macedon Trust	7	permanent	—	150,000
Rochdale	Smallbridge	13	temporary	—	150,000
Blackpool	Merseside	24	permanent	—	269,500
Guildford	Guildford Park and Westborough	17	permanent	57,500	—

Archaeological Diggings

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional funds are being made available to English Heritage in respect of the archaeological diggings in Lower Thames street; what further action his Department is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Newham North-West (Mr. Banks) on 18 April, at columns *77-78*. English Heritage has not asked for additional funds for this purpose.

Community Charge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the effects of the introduction of the community charge on the tenants of almshouses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: We considered the position of people in various types of accommodation when deciding on the definition of hostels, the residents of which will be exempt from the community charge. Our conclusion was that, in general, only establishments offering a high level of care should qualify. The tenants of almshouses will be able to apply for rebates of up to 80 per cent, if their incomes are low. Those in receipt of income support will have their income support increased to help them meet their 20 per cent. community charge payment.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from hon. Members on the levying of a community charge on second homes.

Mr. Gummer: We have received a good many representations on this and other aspects of the community charge.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he intends to publish guidelines for private landlords on the need to deduct rates from combined rent and rates charges with the introduction of the community charge in April 1990;

(2) what protection will be offered to tenants in the private rented sector, who presently pay combined rent and rates charges, with the introduction of the community charge in April 1990.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 21 April.

Mr. Buckley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce a transitional period for households with substantial increases in payments following the introduction of the poll tax in April 1990.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax.

The Government have proposed a safety net which will provide transitional protection for areas in which there would otherwise be substantial increases in average bills per household. The community charge rebate system will give further protection to chargepayers with low incomes.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each local authority in England *(a)* the illustrative community charge for 1989-90 (i) within and (ii) without safety net, *(b)* the comparable figures for 1988-89, *(c)* the percentage changes between the two years, *(d)* the average rate bill per household for 1989-90 and *(e)* the average number of adults per household.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in which month he expects to announce illustrative 1989-89 community charges for Nottingham based upon the forthcoming year's rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Gummer: As in previous years, I intend publishing illustrative community charges for all local authority areas in England when detailed budget returns have been received. The date of publication will depend on prompt submission of those budget returns. So far 343 out of the 426 returns have been submitted.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the regulations which give poll tax registration officers access to local education authority lists containing the names and addresses of school pupils' parents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. The regulations governing the administration of the community charge in England and Wales are the Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989 (S.I. 1989/438). Regulation 6 requires certain public bodies on request to provide the community charges registration officer (CCRO) with names, addresses and periods of residence where such information is within the possession or control of those bodies. The local education authority is among the bodies concerned, but the governors or proprietors of schools (who maintain registers containing the names and addresses of parents) are not. Whether such names and addresses can be given to the CCRO will therefore depend upon whether they have been passed into the possession or control of the authority. The authority may not inspect or take an extract from a school register other than for educational purposes.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Her Majesty's Government have identified a safe long-term method of disposing permanently of nuclear waste.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government believe that safe disposal routes for radioactive wastes can be developed in the United Kingdom. The Government have accepted Nirex's recommendation that a repository for low and intermediate-level radioactive waste should be constructed in the form of a mine under the land and that further investigations should be undertaken to determine the suitability of Sellafield or Dounreay for construction of a repository. Heat-generating radioactive wastes will be stored for at least 50 years to allow them to cool before a final decision on disposal is taken.

Caravan Parks

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his new model standards for caravan parks.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend published the revised model standards on 19 April. Separate standards have been specified for permanent residential mobile home sites and for holiday caravan sites. As a result of research sponsored by my Department, the spacing standard for holiday caravans with aluminium or other similar fire-resistant exteriors has been reduced from 6 to 5m. This takes account of the changes which have occurred in the caravan industry over the past decade and, together with other changes in the new standards, should lead to more attractive holiday caravan site layouts.

The standards have been circulated to all local authorities in England and Wales and to other interested bodies and copies have been placed in the House Libraries. I am sending my hon. Friend a copy.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the status of the London Docklands development corporation will be upon the expiry of its enterprise zone status.

Mr. Trippier: When the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone expires the corporation will cease to be the enterprise zone authority for the purposes of part XVIII of and schedule 32 to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, and will then gain the full range of planning powers in that area of docklands. Its status will otherwise be unchanged.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all planning permissions given by the London Docklands development corporation along the river Thames in the borough of Southwark which secure a public riverside walkway.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* A list of 17 permissions given by the LDDC since 1981 has been placed in the Library. The corporation is committed to securing extensive riverside and dockside access throughout its area. Twelve miles of waterside are so far accessible, and a further 15 miles are proposed.

Lindane (Lost Container)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the current whereabouts of the container of lindane lost on 13 March.

Mr. Portillo: I have been asked to reply.

The container, lost while under tow by a French ship to Cherbourg, was thought to be about 25 km north-west of the Cap de la Hague. The French authorities, who are responsible for co-ordinating counter-pollution operations in that area of the Channel, have carried out an intensive but unsuccessful search for it using both surface vessels and a submersible. That special search has now been called off on the basis of a joint Anglo/French scientific assessment of the pollution threat which concluded that the physical nature of the lindane, the packaging, depth of water in which the container was lost, water currents and other factors, are such that the likelihood of contamination is much less than at first feared.

In the process of normal training and exercises, the French Navy will continue to look for the missing container. The French authorities also continue to carry out an intensive programme of sampling and analysis of seawater and fish.

Bathing Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost at current prices to each water authority in England to bring the bathing beaches that fail to meet the standards laid down in the European Community bathing water directive (76/160/EEC) into conformity.

Mr. Howard: Water authorities are spending about £100 million a year on schemes to improve the quality of bathing waters and this rate of spending is likely to increase. However, detailed proposals for schemes to improve bathing waters are still being formulated and it is too soon to estimate the total spending required by each authority to meet EC bathing water quality standards.

Public Rights of Way

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was his Department's response to the Countryside Commission's consultation papers, "Paths, Routes and Trails" and "Changing the Rights of Way Network".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has not commented on either paper.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how his Department measures the reduction in the time taken to decide opposed rights of way orders in the absence of information on the receipt of, and replies to, letters by his Department's offices in Bristol; and if he will publish such information as is available to indicate how substantial the reduction is.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The time between the submission of an order to the Department's Bristol office and the issue of a decision is recorded for every case. The median from submission to decision in 1987-88 was 53 weeks; in 1988-89 this time was reduced to 40 weeks.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number and proportion of empty dwellings at the latest available date in *(a)* the private rented sector, *(b)* the housing association sector, *(c)* the central Government sector and *(d)* the local authority sector.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* Estimates derived from the housing investment programme returns of English local authorities for April 1988 are as follows:

	Vacant dwellings (number in '000s)	*Vacant dwellings as a percentage of stock*
Local authority[1]	101·2	2·4
Housing Association	12·7	2·5
Other public sector[2]	16·1	6·5
Private[3]	579·5	4·1

[1] Includes dwellings which are closed or have been acquired for demolition but excludes dwellings on overspill estates.

[2] Includes housing owned by new towns, county councils, Government Departments, nationalised industries, other public bodies and council dwellings on overspill estates. Many of these are vacant because of operational requirements, notably those owned by the Ministry of Defence and others have been acquired for demolition for example, by the Department of Transport. The Government are encouraging the sale of housing which is surplus to requirements and many of those that are vacant are in the process of disposal.

[3] Includes owner-occupied as well as private rented dwellings.

Local Authority Employees (Pensions)

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will introduce regulations to allow part-time local government employees to buy additional service for pension purposes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* These proposed regulations were held up for a long time by a dispute between the local government employers and unions. Since this was settled we have needed to consult other Departments on the proposal that the regulations should apply not only to present employees but to those who have retired since April 1986. This has just been agreed. We will now give the preparation of the regulations as much priority as possible. In view of this agreement those employees who retire before the regulations are made will not be placed at a disadvantage.

River Mersey (Pollution)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what chemicals the Norsochem works is allowed to discharge into the Mersey; and in what quantities.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* I understand that the company currently has deemed consent to discharge a range of organic chemicals into the Mersey. Details of the type and quantity of chemicals which the company is allowed to discharge are on the public register maintained by the North West water authority and available for inspection.

I understand that the North West water authority is shortly to replace the deemed consent with a positively determined consent. Details of this consent including the conditions to which it is subject, will also be entered on the public register.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions relating to pollution of the Mersey his Department has brought against companies for the time for which figures are available; and what were the verdicts and fines in each case.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* Responsibility for enforcement of water pollution controls over industry rests with the regional water authorities and comprehensive information about prosecutions is not held centrally.

However, I understand that in 1987, the North West water authority brought a total of 23 prosecutions for offences committed under part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, in the Mersey catchment as a whole. All resulted in convictions, with an average fine imposed of £680. Of the prosecutions brought in 1988, 17 have so far been tried, all resulting in convictions with average fines of £670.

Local Authority Services

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* those services which local authorities must presently provide free of charge; *(b)* those services for which local authorities are permitted to charge in accordance with regulations or primary legislation, where the charges are set in those regulations of primary legislation, where the charges are set in those regulations or primary legislation or otherwise by the Government and (3) those services for which local authorities are permitted to charge in accordance with regulations or primary legislation, where the charges are for local discretion.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* This information is not available in precisely the form requested by the hon. Member. I am placing in the Library such information as is available about local authorities' charging powers.

Peak Park (Planning Applications)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications for house building have been made to the Peak park planning board; how many have been successful; and how many have been for starter homes and how many for family residences.

Mr. Trippier: Since April 1984, the Peak park joint planning board has dealt with 1,110 planning applications for house building, of which 11 were for starter homes. A total of 626 applications (56·4 per cent.) were approved including six for starter homes. No records are kept of the number of family residences involved in the applications.

Council Houses

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement further to his reply of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *600*, about council houses.

Mr. Trippier: No.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 26 April 1989

DEFENCE

Royal Armoured Corps

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on manning levels at all ranks in the Royal Armoured Corps.

Mr. Neubert: At 31 December 1988 soldier strength in the Royal Armoured Corps was 63 men, or 0·8 per cent., below its establishment of 8,039. Because the rank ranging system of filling posts is employed in the Royal Armoured Corps, it is not possible to split the establishment down into ranks, but the shortfall is at the bottom of the structure.

At 31 December 1988 officer strength in the Royal Armoured Corps was 1,268, 103 officers (8 per cent.) below establishment. Almost all the shortfall is at the rank of captain.

RSRE, Malvern

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to dispose of the RSRE north site, Malvern.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Ministry of Defence has no plans at present to dispose of the north site at RSRE Malvern. The possibility of establishing a science park using part of the site is under consideration.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken following receipt of the feasibility plan for use of the RSRE north site Malvern, sent by PA Consultants in December 1987.

Mr. Sainsbury: The consultants report examined the feasibility of establishing a science park using part of the north site at RSRE, Malvern. Consideration is being given to the way ahead, taking into account our recent announcement of intentions regarding the defence research agency, in which RSRE would be included.

Defence Estimates

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to publish the 1989 "Statement on the Defence Estimates".

Mr. Younger: I intend to publish this year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates" on Tuesday 2 May.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Firework Injuries

92. **Mr. Gould:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, if he will now publish the firework injury statistics for 1988.

Mr. Forth: The firework injury statistics were published in answer to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on 20 April, at columns*256-58*.

Paper and Pulp Imports

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the United Kingdom's imports of *(a)* paper and *(b)* pulp in each year since 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is given in the following table:

United Kingdom imports of paper and paperboard, waste paper and paperboard and pulp 1979-88

£ million

	Paper and paperboard	*Waste paper and paper-board*	*Pulp*
1979	1,081·6	4·5	384·3
1980	1,104·9	2·8	395·9
1981	1,321·1	1·8	436·7
1982	1,409·3	3·6	408·4
1983	1,575·9	2·2	425·8
1984	1,874·6	8·2	603·5
1985	2,057·9	9·0	496·8
1986	2,182·2	3·7	519·6
1987	2,632·6	6·7	650·6
1988	3,014·6	8·9	716·4

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics
Note: 1988 figures provisional.

Machine Safety

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement setting out the manner in which the adoption of the machine safety directive will facilitate the flow of trade within the EEC.

Mr. Maude: The aim of the machinery safety directive, which covers a wide range of machines, is the removal of barriers to trade through the harmonisation of legislation in member states. It lays down the essential requirements and certification procedures that machines have to meet to ensure free circulation throughout the Community.

Once the directive has been adopted and implemented, manufacturers or their agents resident in the Community will be required to ensure their machines meet the relevant essential safety requirements before they can market their products in the European Community. Manufacturers can choose the method of meeting the essential requirements from a number of options, including the use of harmonised European standards. The adoption of this directive will help remove the special requirements that exist in some member states, which have prevented free trade in the past. As a result, an open, single market will be created, which will enable the United Kingdom industry to compete on an equal footing in the European Community.

Artificial Limbs

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on artificial lower limbs is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The report on the supply of artificial lower limbs in the United Kingdom is published today. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission found that certain

conduct of the largest supplier of artifical lower limbs in the United Kingdom, InterMed Ltd., a subsidiary of BTR plc with a market share of 70 per cent., operated against the public interest. Chas A. Blatchford and Sons Ltd., with a 26 per cent. market share, was also a monopolist, but the Commission did not find any conduct of this company that operated against the public interest.

The commission found that InterMed, through its three subsidiaries—J. E. Hanger & Co. Ltd., Vessa Ltd., and Robert Kellie and Son Ltd.—had obtained prices for, and profits from, its supply of artificial lower limbs which were higher that could be expected in circumstances of normal competition. In addition, it had used its monopoly position to place unreasonable pressure on public sector purchasers, having regard to the nature of the sector, and had been unco-operative with them. Because of this InterMed had not given sufficient regard to the interests of patients.

The commission recommended that, subject to a report from the disablement services authority to the Director General of Fair Trading on the impact of the impending round of tendering for prosthetic services at certain disablement services centres on InterMed's business, InterMed should divest itself (within six months of 30 April 1989) either of Hanger or Vessa, and that neither company should be sold to Blatchfords. They also recommend that, both before and after such divestment, InterMed be required to supply the products in question to any public sector purchaser or contractor on the same terms, conditions and prices as they were made available to its own prosthetists and technicians; and the Director General of Fair Trading invite a further report from the DSA by 30 September 1990 on the progress made towards promoting a more competitive market.

I welcome this report and accept the MMC's findings and conclusions. However, in view of current changes in the state of competition in this market, I am asking the Director General of Fair Trading to advise me as soon as possible whether in order to remedy the adverse effects the MMC identified it is still necessary to require InterMed to divest part of its artificial lower limbs activities. Also I am inviting the Director General to seek undertakings from BTR, or its subsidiary InterMed, not to discriminate between, on the one hand, public sector purchasers and contractors and, on the other, its own prosthetists and technicians in the supply of artificial lower limbs.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the internal market Council held on 13 April.

Mr. Maude: The Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, adopted directives on secondary fertilisers and on the design and construction of side guards to be fitted to heavy goods vehicles.

It also reached common positions on three proposals, as follows. The draft 11th company law directive requires companies from outside a member state that establish a place of business (or branch) in that member state to deliver certain documents, including accounting documents, to the relevant companies registry. The broadcasting directive will break down existing barriers to the free flow of television programmes across frontiers in the Community; and a directive on dangerous substances will harmonise restrictions on the marketing and use of seven dangerous substances and preparations.

The Council also discussed the proposal for an EC merger control regulation, and the draft directive on right of residence thoughout the Community for EC nationals not already deemed to have such a right under the free movement provisions of the Treaty of Rome.

Urea (Imports)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what arrangements exist to control the import of urea from non-European Community countries; and if he will list the tariffs imposed on each supplier nation.

Mr. Alan Clark: There are no quota restrictions on imports of urea into the United Kingdom, although certain overseas countries gave volume undertakings on their exports to the Community as a result of two anti-dumping investigations completed in 1987 and 1989.

There are two EC import duty rates; 11 per cent. for urea which contains 45 per cent. or more by weight of nitrogen on the dry anhydrous product and 8 per cent. for all other types. However, imports of urea from most developing countries are allowed into the EC duty free under GSP arrangements and under various EC trade agreements. The only exceptions are Venezuela and Mexico, whose imports under the 11 per cent. duty rate are subject to the full rate of duty, and Romania, for which all types of urea are subject to the full duty rate. Definitive anti-dumping duties are applicable to imports of urea from Libya, Saudi Arabia, the United States of America (with the exception of one company) and Venezuela.

Girobank

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on any proposal to renegotiate the counters contract and the Department of Social Security contract to the advantage of Girobank in the light of Alliance and Leicester's conditional offer of purchase.

Mr. Forth: Any renegotiation of the terms of the contracts between Girobank and Post Office Counters and between Girobank and the Department of Social Security is a matter for the parties concerned.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will place in the Library the information on publicity campaigns referred to in the answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 10 April, *Official Report*, column *399*.

Mr. Forth: The information requested has now been placed in the Library of the House.

Aircraft Exports

Mr. George: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if British Aerospace sought authorisation from his Department for the flight to, and exhibition at, Baghdad, of an advanced Hawk trainer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 25 April 1989]*: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to

comment on individual licensing matters. Licences are required for the export to Iraq of military equipment which is subject to control under the Export of Goods (Control) Order (S.I. 1987 No. 2070), as amended.

Applications for such licences are examined in particular against the guidelines on the export of defence equipment to Iran and Iraq announced to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary of 29 October 1985, at column 454.

Mr. George: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he takes to ensure that military aeroplanes licensed for export for training purposes are not converted to combat use.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* Licences are required for the export to all destinations of military aeroplanes which are subject to control under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1987 (S.I. 1987 No. 2070) as amended.

Applications for such licences are considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with stringent export control procedures.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners' Earnings Limit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are entitled to *(a)* the single retirement pension, and *(b)* the married couples' retirement pension; and of these how many are currently affected, in each category, by the pensioners' earnings limit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Statistics relating to entitlement to retirement pension cannot be broken down according to marital status. Approximately 2,500 individuals currently have their basic pension reduced on account of earnings over £75 a week. In addition, approximately 200,000 individuals deferring receipt of their state pension because of earnings over £75 a week may now choose to draw their pension.

Oglesby Report

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to implement the recommendations in the Oglesby report that mobility allowance tribunals and social security appeal tribunals should be amalgamated.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the present system, non-medical questions arising on mobility allowance claims are decided, on appeal, by social security appeal tribunals; medical questions are decided by medical boards and thereafter, if necessary, by medical appeal tribunals. We have no plans at present to revise this aspect of medical adjudication.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make available any instructions issued since 1965 to staff in his Department whose duties involve either visiting or assessing claims from people who are mentally handicapped concerning the manner in which such claims are to be assessed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There have been no instructions on assessment of claims from mentally handicapped people, and their appointees, beyond those which apply to all claimants. A copy of the 'S' manual containing current assessment instructions is in the Library.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what special training is given to staff in his Department to make sure that they deal effectively and sympathetically with claims from people who are mentally handicapped and their families.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Department's staff involved in customer service receive advice and guidance on dealing sympathetically and efficiently with disabled people.

More detailed and specific training is given to social fund officers, and covers the need to recognise and appreciate the significance of disability, including mental handicap, and the problems and circumstances arising. This training is now available to all local office staff.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence he has of the past underpayment of substantial amounts of supplementary benefit to mentally handicapped people because of inadequate assessment of their cases by staff in his Department; and what steps he is taking to remedy this situation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no statistics available on the accuracy of the assessment in respect of claims for supplementary benefit from the mentally handicapped. The award of supplementary benefit, which was replaced in April 1988 by income support, is a matter for the independent statutory authorities.

Social Security Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the names of the chairman and wing members of the Hartlepool social security appeal tribunal and give information of their backgrounds and the reasons they were considered suitable to serve on the tribunal.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The appointment of members and the nomination of the chairman to the Hartlepool social security appeal tribunal is the responsibility of the president, His Honour Judge Byrt, QC, and the hon. Member may care to contact him direct.

Income Support

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what alterations he plans to make to income support provision for asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I am pleased to announce that all people, including asylum seekers, who are entitled to urgent case payments will in future receive the appropriate income support premiums, to which they are not entitled at present.

This follows a commitment I gave during the Committee stage of the Social Security Bill to consider the position of asylum seekers who claim income support.

Families, in particular, who are eligible for the payments will find themselves significantly better off as a result of these changes. All such families will gain £6·50 a week; lone parents will gain £10·40 a week, and families

with a disabled child £13·00 a week. The representations in Committee referred to the level of benefit paid under the old rules to a lone parent with a disabled child. These changes will provide an extra £16·90 a week in those circumstances.

I intend to lay before the House regulations to bring these beneficial changes into effect from July.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give for 1978, 1979 and 1988 for each social security office and each social security region, the number of *(a)* claimants and *(b)* dependants on (i) supplementary benefit or income support and (ii) family income support or family credit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as can be obtained as soon as possible.

Social Fund

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for the Doncaster and Mexborough areas of South Yorkshire to date what statistical information he has as to the different reasons given by social fund officers *(a)* for negative decisions to claimants on (i) budgeting loans and (ii) partial awards and *(b)* to claimants for nil award decisions for (i) community care grants and (ii) partial awards.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 17 April 1989]:* The local offices in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas of South Yorkshire are Doncaster East, Doncaster West, and Wath on Dearne.

The table gives the number of times that a reason for decision is used by social fund officers for determining a nil award for community care grants and budgeting loans.

No information is collected on reasons for decision for partial awards.

An application can be refused for more than one reason. The total number of reasons for decision used will be equal to or greater than the number of applications refused. Information on the numbers of applications processed and awards is available in the Library.

	Number
DONCASTER EAST	
Budgeting Loans—Reasons for Decision	
Savings over £500 meet the full cost:	2
Not in receipt of IS:	79
Not in receipt of IS for 26 weeks:	429
Item(s) excluded by direction:	71
Applicant excluded:	4
Applied for less than £30:	38
Adjusted amount less than £30:	12
Total debt exceeds £1,000:	0
Previous application and decision for the item:	51
Inability to repay:	16
Help available from other source.	7
Priority too low to meet from the budget.	492
Alternative available to whole application.	4
Loan refused because CCG awarded.	33
Others not covered above.	74
Community Care Grants—Reasons for Decision	
Savings over £500 meet the full cost:	0
Not in receipt of IS and unlikely to qualify:	29
Item(s) excluded by Direction:	19
Applicant excluded by Direction:	0
Applied for less than £30:	7
Adjusted amount less than £30:	2
Previous application and decision for the item:	15
Help available from another source.	3
Priority too low to meet from the budget.	3
Alternative available to the whole application	1
Others not covered above.	271

	Number
DONCASTER WEST	
Budgeting Loans—Reasons for Decision	
Savings over £500 meet the full cost	1
Not in receipt of IS	126
Not in receipt of IS for 26 weeks	315
Item(s) excluded by direction	70
Applicant excluded	1
Applied for less than £30	34
Adjusted amount less than £30	18
Total debt exceeds £1,000	0
Previous application and decision for the item	48
Inability to repay	70
Help available from another source	22
Priority too low to meet from the budget	328
Alternative available to whole application	24
Loan refused because CCG awarded	35
Others not covered above	121
Community Care Grants—Reasons for decision	
Savings over £500 meet the full cost	3
Not in receipt of IS and unlikely to qualify	38
Item(s) excluded by direction	18
Applicant excluded by direction	1
Applied for less than £30	11
Adjusted amount less than £30	2
Previous application and decision for the item	14
Help available from another source	6
Priority too low to meet from the budget	4
Alternative available to whole application	3
Others not covered above	345

	Number
WATH ON DEARNE	
Budgeting loans—reasons for decision	
Savings over £500 meet the full cost:	0
Not in receipt of IS:	73
Not in receipt of IS for 26 weeks:	227
Item(s) excluded by direction:	42
Applicant excluded:	1
Applied for less than £30:	13
Adjusted amount less than £30:	2
Total debt exceeds £1,000:	0
Previous application and decision for the item:	14
Inability to repay:	15
Help available from another source.	0
Priority too low to meet from the budget.	182
Alternative available to whole application.	0
Loan refused because CCG awarded.	18
Others not covered above.	80
Community care grants—reasons for decision	
Savings over £500 meet the full cost:	0
Not in receipt of IS and unlikely to qualify:	26
Item(s) excluded by direction:	13
Applicant excluded by direction:	2
Applied for less than £30:	3
Adjusted amount less than £30:	0
Previous application and decision for the item:	0
Help available from another source.	2
Priority too low to meet from the budget.	1
Alternative available to the whole application.	0
Others not covered above.	15

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

CSCE Information Forum

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria were used in choosing the members of the British delegation to the CSCE information forum starting in London on 18 April; what consideration was given to consulting trade union representatives from unions whose members are involved in the collection and dissemination of news, current affairs and cultural matters, in the process of selection and nomination for selection; and what consideration was given to consulting other representative bodies in the media and cultural field.

Mrs. Chalker: Invitations to join the British delegation to the London information forum were issued to a large number of people, with a view to constituting a balanced and representative team able to bring appropriate expertise to a wide agenda. The formation of the delegation was preceded by consultations attended by numerous organisations. The TUC did not respond to our invitation to participate or supply comments.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria were used in deciding the appointment of the leader of the British delegation to the CSCE information forum, starting in London on 18 April.

Mrs. Chalker: Having decided that the British delegation should if possible be led by a personality from outside Government, Ministers sought an eminent and independent individual with a sound knowledge of public affairs and wide experience of the written and broadcast media. Britain is in fact the only country whose delegation is led by a person from outside Government.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he took of Lord Rees-Mogg's record of service at *The Times*, the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Broadcasting Standards Council in deciding to make the appointment of the leader of the British delegation to the CSCE information forum.

Mrs. Chalker: Lord Rees-Mogg was invited to lead the United Kingdom delegation to the London information forum because of his wide experience of public affairs and of the written and broadcast media.

Hong Kong

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will define the role and duties of the governor of Hong Kong.

Mrs. Chalker: The governor is the personal representative of the Queen in Hong Kong. He is responsible to the Secretary of State. He directs the administration of Hong Kong and is the commander-in-chief of the British forces stationed in Hong Kong. As head of the Hong Kong Government he presides at meetings of the Executive Council. He is also president of the Legislative Council.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote United Kingdom interests in Hong Kong after 1997.

Mrs. Chalker: Our interests will be principally met by the effective implementation of the Joint Declaration and the maintenance of Hong Kong as an international financial and commercial centre. Against this background we are encouraging the private sector to build on our existing commercial successes in Hong Kong both as an important market in its own right and as an export centre for the Asia Pacific region. We will continue to foster our cultural links with the territory. We are actively preparing to establish a British consulate-general for the promotion of our interests in Hong Kong after 1997.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the objectives of Government policy on Hong Kong.

Mrs. Chalker: Our prime objective is the continued stability and prosperity of Hong Kong and its people. To this end we are committed to fulfil our responsibility for the administration of Hong Kong until 30 June 1997 and to ensure the full and faithful implementation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong. We also aim to foster and strengthen Britain's commercial and other links with Hong Kong up to and beyond 1997.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Chlorofluorocarbons

91. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what level of financial assistance he is giving or planning to give to other nations to ensure that no extra financial burden is placed upon them in moving away from chlorofluorocarbon-based technology.

Mr. Chris Patten: Within our overseas aid programme we are ready to respond positively to requests for assistance from development countries. For example, the Government are willing to help countries find ways of avioding the use of CFCs and to examine the implications of CFC-free strategies. We have just offered India £40 million of new local costs aid for environmental projects. Most of this is expected to be spent on forestry, but it is also available to help that country adopt alternative practices to the use of CFCs.

ENERGY

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Parkinson: As at 1 April 1989 numbers in the support grades were 51, of whom one was a casual. There was one vacancy of more than one month's standing. Overtime averages 290 hours per month in London for 47 staff and 60 hours per month elsewhere for four staff.

Coal Industry

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the areas of British Coal in order of production levels and the number of major injuries sustained in each area as a proportion of the work force.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information requested, in a form that is available, is as follows:

Rate of Major Injuries per 100,000 manshifts

Area-Group[1]	*Number*
Notts	2·70
North Yorkshire	2·93
South Yorkshire	2·75
Central	2·33
North East	2·88
North West	2·36
South Wales	3·78
Scottish	3·70
Kent	3·90

[1] Listed in order of revenue output during 1988-89

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the number of licensed mines currently in operation; how many people are employed therein; and what proportion of these workers have suffered significant industrial injury in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: As at December 1988 there were 166 licensed mines operating in Britain, employing just over 2,000 men. Information which shows whether these particular men have suffered significant injuries is not available. However, the major accident rates for licensed mines for the years for which information is available are as follows:

Accident rates in licensed mines (for 1,000 men)

	Number
1986-87	21·90
1987-88	21·60
1988-89	13·3

Non-fossil Fuel Technologies

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which non-fossil fuel technologies the Government regard as sufficiently established to provide substantial generation in the United Kingdom on a time scale of 15 years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Nuclear and hydro-electricity energy are both already making a substantial contribution to electricity generation in the United Kingdom and will continue to do so.

In addition, tidal and wind energy, landfill gas and the combustion of solid wastes have the potential to make a substantial contribution within 15 years.

Greenhouse Effect (Control)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what is his policy on the role to be played by nuclear power in this country and abroad in helping to reduce and control the greenhouse effect; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he is able to estimate the probable reduction per year in the level of carbon dioxide emissions, expressed in million tonnes, by substituting one pressurised water reactor for an equivalent capacity coal-fired station;

(3) whether a United Kingdom pro-rata contribution to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. of their 1988 levels, as called for in the Toronto conference statement to combat the greenhouse effect, could be met solely through Government-led energy conservation, the increased use of renewable energy sources and the novel coal burning technologies currently under development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Nuclear power is already making a significant contribution to curbing emissions of carbon dioxide both here and abroad and I believe that it has an important contribution to make as part of any future international response to the threat of manmade climate change. I estimate that in broad terms substitution of a large PWR for equivalent coal-fired generation might reduce carbon dioxide emissions by around 6 million tonnes a year.

The inter-governmental panel on climate change, to which the United Kingdom has given its full support, is currently conducting a wide-ranging review of the climate change issue; it is therefore inappropriate to consider specific emission reduction targets at this time. It is likely, however, that any response would vary according to the economic and technical circumstances of individual countries and involve a wide range of measures including improved efficiency in both the supply and use of energy as well as moves toward less carbon-intensive fuels. My Department's policies for encouraging economic energy efficiency, the development of renewable energy sources, and diversity in supply are a firm basis for any future action.

Offshore Installations (Safety)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the application offshore of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Mr. Peter Morrison: An Order in Council has today been laid before Parliament, the main effect of which is to bring gas storage and accommodation installations, and mobile installations in transit, within the scope of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The general provisions of the 1974 Act were applied offshore in 1977.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (Application outside Great Britain) (Variation) Order 1989 brings the definitions of offshore installation and pipeline into line with those currently in force in other offshore safety legislation.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council which commenced on 17 April in Brussels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made earlier today.

Food Contamination

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress his Department has made in the reduction and elimination of food contamination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: We are making good progress in implementing the wide range of measures which we are taking with the aim of continuing to ensure that food is safe.

Nature Conservation

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report on the progress made in establishing water management trials at Southlake Moor, King's Sedgemoor and West Sedgemoor to monitor the benefit of wetland wildlife; and whether the trials will provide information on water pump level variations.

Mr. Ryder: Two water management trials are proceeding on West Sedgemoor and South Lake Moor. Further possible trial sites, including King's Sedgemoor, are still under investigation. The trials will provide information on water pump level variations to help assess the benefit to wetland wildlife.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of ESA agreements reached with owners and occupiers within the area known as the Somerset Levels and Moors, the area of land involved and the total cost of payments made to the end of January 1989 in 1989 prices.

Mr. Ryder: The total number of agreements reached within the Somerset Levels and Moors ESA by the end of 1988 is 642 covering an area of 8,877 hectares. These agreements have resulted in payments which in total cost £1·458 million in 1989 prices, to the end of the 1988-89 financial year.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce a new provision in the Water Bill which would enable internal drainage boards to adopt water management regimes for the purpose of enhancing nature conservation.

Mr. Ryder: Internal drainage boards are already required by section 48 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to further the interests of conservation consistent with their land drainage responsibilities. This duty is carried forward under clause 8 of the Water Bill. Specific advice on water level management is included in our guidelines to drainage authorities on their section 48 responsibilities which was issued last year.

Rosewarne Experimental Horticulture Establishment

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will defer the closure of Rosewarne experimental horticulture establishment until 31 October to enable current research programmes to be completed and to facilitate negotiations for its future.

Mr. Ryder: It is not proposed to close Rosewarne before 31 October. Final decisions on the closure will not be taken until my noble Friend the Baroness Trumpington has completed her consultations with interested bodies on the industry funding of near-market research.

Nuclear Waste

Mr John Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on environmental damage in relation to discharge of nuclear waste products in the sea around the Cornish coastline.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The effects of liquid radioactive waste discharged by major nuclear sites to the marine environment around the United Kingdom coastline are monitored by my Department as part of its regular programme of aquatic environmental monitoring.

The results of this monitoring, which are published annually, demonstrate that radioactivity around the Cornish coastline and elsewhere does not occur at levels likely to result in damage to either the marine environment or the living resources which it supports.

HEALTH

Food Poisoning

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to license manufacturing, distribution, catering and retail premises in order to reduce food poisoning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: A proposal that all food businesses should be registered is being considered as part of the review of the Food Act 1984.

Dental and Eye Tests

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what month he expects to make comparisons between the number of dental and eye tests before and after the introduction of charges.

Mr. Mellor: Demand for dental treatment is subject to short-term fluctuation irrespective of changes made to charges. The Department monitors the number of courses scheduled for payment each month. It is unlikely that an assessment of whether there has been an effect on demand following the introduction of the examination charge can be made until figures are available for the quarter July-September 1989. On sight tests, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him of 17 April, at column *47*.

NHS Capital Expenditure

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of capital expenditure in the National Health Service, at constant prices, in each year since 1959.

Mr. Freeman: The table shows capital expenditure on the NHS in each year between 1959 and 1988 in 1988 prices. The figure for 1988 reflects the latest available estimate of receipts from land sales and so on, in 1988. The figures have been derived from the United Kingdom national accounts prepared by the Central Statistical Office.

NHS capital expenditure 1988 prices

	£ million
1959	309
1960	334
1961	382
1962	461
1963	492
1964	602
1965	657
1966	715
1967	862
1968	927
1969	843

	£ million
1970	871
1971	961
1972	1,086
1973	1,250
1974	1,136
1975	1,156
1976	1,136
1977	1,033
1978	1,030
1979	1,088
1980	1,019
1981	1,034
1982	1,125
1983	1,132
1984	1,211
1985	1,243
1986	1,334
1987	1,238
1988	[1]1,110

[1] Estimate

Consultants

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to announce the names of the health districts which are to get extra consultants; what criteria are being used for the allocation of the 100 posts; which authorities have applied for extra consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We wrote to health authorities on 13 April inviting them to submit bids for the 100 extra consultant posts announced in "Working for Patients" by 31 July 1989. We expect to notify authorities of successful bids in October. I refer the right hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on 7 March, at column 487, for the criteria which will be used in allocating the posts.

Opencast Sites

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there has been any increase in the incidence of asthma, stomach ulcers, arthritis or ear infection in areas which neighbour or are close to opencast sites.

Mr. Freeman: Information of this type is not available centrally.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will detail the National Health Service provision for those addicted to the benzodiazepine drugs who are trying to end their dependency.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this information centrally. Services for those dependent on benzodiazepines are provided by general practitioners, general psychiatric services, community drug teams, and specialist services for those experiencing problems with illicit or prescribed drugs.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the annual number of prescriptions for the five most common benzodiazepine drugs.

Mr. Mellor: The number of prescriptions for the five benzodiazepines most commonly dispensed by community pharmacists in Great Britain in 1987 was as follows:

Thousands

Drug	Number of prescriptions
Temazepam	7,752
Nitrazepam	5,227
Diazepam	5,078
Lorazepam	2,902
Triazolam	2,226

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has as to the frequency with which general practitioners prescribe benzodiazepine drugs for periods longer than that recommended by the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Mr. Mellor: We do not collect centrally any information about the length of time for which GPs prescribe drugs for patients.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of groups known to be working with benzodiazepine sufferers; if he will give the funds allocated to each by his Department; and if he will consider providing core funding for all such groups.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold centrally a list of groups working with those dependent on benzodiazepines. The Department is, however, funding the National Association for Mental Health (MIND) to produce a national directory of services for this group.

The provision and funding of direct client services for this group is the responsibility of the local statutory authorities. In order to pump-prime the development of local services for those experiencing problems with illicit or prescribed drugs, the Government established a central funding initiative, under which £17·5 million was allocated to 188 local projects. In addition, since 1986 the Government have allocated funds to regional health authorities specifically for the development of drug misuse services, including services for those dependent on benzodiazepines. This funding totals almost £15 million in 1989-90.

Core funding under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 is awarded primarily to national organisations. Under this scheme in 1988-89 the Department gave a grant of £10,000 to TRANX (UK) Ltd. The Department's grant to MIND also covers the production of public information material on benzodiazepines.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consult pharmaceutical companies producing benzodiazepines about ways in which they could help those who have become addicted to these drugs.

Mr. Freeman: Those who have become dependent on benzodiazepines can obtain help from their general practitioner, the general psychiatric services, community drug teams, specialist drug dependency services, and voluntary agencies.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will detail the action he has taken to encourage general practitioners not normally to prescribe the benzodiazepine drugs for periods longer than those recommended by the Committee on Safety of Medicines; and if he will take further action.

Mr. Mellor: General practitioners now have all the information and advice, including that from the Committee on Safety of Medicines, that they need to prescribe benzodiazepines. It is up to doctors to take heed of this advice and to exercise their clinical judgment when prescribing in each case.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will allocate funds for research into the damage to various organs of the body that can arise from the use of the benzodiazepine drugs.

Mr. Mellor: I have no plans to do so.

Medical Records

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to require general practitioners to record in their patients' medical records full details of all prescriptions.

Mr. Mellor: No. Under his terms of service a general practitioner is already required to keep adequate records of the illnesses and treatment of his patients.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to make extended ambulance training compulsory for all ambulance service personnel in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No. At the discretion of employing authorities, extended training can be made available to qualified and leading ambulance personnel, but on a voluntary basis.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers

Mr. Wall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he is taking to obtain an accurate account of teacher shortages in secondary education.

Mrs. Rumbold: My Department collects information from local education authorities each year on the number of vacant posts by secondary subject. The results of the secondary staffing survey, conducted last year, will be available shortly.

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on restoration of the negotiating rights of teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received approximately 120 letters on this issue since 1 January 1989 both directly and through hon. Members.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in the recruitment of teachers of shortage subjects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Department launched its action programme on teacher shortages in 1986. Recruitment to initial teacher training last year showed an increase in mathematics by 27 per cent., in science by 9 per cent. and in technology by 39 per cent. over the levels in 1986. The Government will develop their action programme as necessary to ensure a sufficient supply of qualified teachers in these subjects to meet the needs of schools.

Schoolchildren (Sport)

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is proposing any steps to encourage Saturday participation in sport by schoolchildren.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no specific plans at present to encourage Saturday participation in sport by schoolchildren. We hope, however, that the inclusion of physical education, of which sport is a component, as a foundation subject in the national curriculum for all pupils aged five to 16 will encourage those who wish to do so both to participate in sport outside school hours and to continue with sport after they leave school.

Nursery Education

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in the work of the working party to investigate nursery education.

Mrs. Rumbold: The committee of inquiry on the quality of the educational experience offered to the under-fives will hold its first meeting on 25 May when I expect it to settle its programme of work.

English Grammar and Verse

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had regarding the inclusion of English grammar and the learning of verse by heart within the national curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: Responses to the consultations on the draft order for English for pupils in the first key stage of the national curriculum have included various comments on the place of grammar and verse learning. These are being considered.

Parent Registers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place a copy in the Library of the guidance he has issued to local education authorities and schools on the compilation of parent registers for opt-out ballot purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Pupils' Registration (Amendment) Regulations 1988 require every school to maintain an admissions register which includes the name and address of each person known to the governing body to be a parent of a registered pupil at the school. Sections 60 and 61 of the Education Reform Act 1988 provide for the use of this information where a ballot of parents on grant-maintained status is contemplated or under way. The Department's circular 10/88, and booklet "School Governors: How To Become A Grant-Maintained School", offer guidance on these provisions. Copies of the regulations, the relevant Administrative memorandum, the circular and booklet were sent to every LEA and school last year. The Department also wrote to all chief education officers on 13 February this year, in part about allegations that some

LEAs were abusing this information. Copies of each of these documents were placed in the Library of the House on publication.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside, of 12 April, *Official Report*, column 526, whether he has any plans to issue guidance to local education authorities and schools on the information to be made available from parent registers to community charge registration officers.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department will shortly be writing to the local authority associations on this subject.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent discussions he has held on the rights of access to parent registers.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has held no recent discussions on this topic.

Language Teaching

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on, and what consideration he has given to, the inclusion of Indic languages as modern foreign languages in the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 23 March, at columns 683-84. Since then, my right hon. Friend has received a number of other representations from hon. Members—including one from the hon. Member—local education authorities, organisations, parents and teachers about the inclusion of Indic languages as modern foreign languages in the national curriculum. We are at present considering the responses received about the proposals during the consultation period.

Meals (Pupil Statistics)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the October 1988 census figures for each local education authority for the number of *(a)* pupils present, *(b)* pupils taking paid meals, *(c)* pupils taking free meals, and *(d)* pupils taking meals in total.

Mr. Butcher: The figures are given in the table. They relate to maintained primary, secondary and special schools and are based on the number of pupils present in schools on the day in October 1988 on which the survey was carried out. As explained in my reply of 14 April, the full results of the survey are contained in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy publication "School Meals Statistics at October 1988" which will shortly be available in the Library.

Number of Pupils

LEA	*Present*	*Taking paid meals*	*Taking free meals*	*Total taking meals*
ILEA	240,360	94,519	68,845	163,364
Barking and Dagenham	19,488	5,635	1,979	7,614
Barnet	35,691	18,212	2,858	11,413
Bexley	28,259	7,238	1,671	8,909
Brent	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Bromley	31,506	10,475	1,794	12,269
Croydon	39,676	14,623	3,332	17,955
Ealing	32,658	10,561	4,162	14,723
Enfield	33,592	10,749	2,770	13,519
Haringey	24,628	8,269	4,800	13,069
Harrow	24,709	11,085	1,156	12,241
Havering	30,913	9,177	1,435	10,562
Hillingdon	26,389	9,776	1,698	11,474
Hounslow	26,741	13,631	2,761	16,392
Kingston-upon-Thames	14,796	5,827	724	6,551
Merton	18,032	4,438	1,208	5,646
Newham	35,185	7,973	6,022	13,995
Redbridge	26,790	10,339	1,576	11,915
Richmond-upon-Thames	14,263	3,548	825	4,373
Sutton	19,896	9,303	906	10,209
Waltham Forest	26,254	8,773	4,266	13,039
Bolton	38,301	14,571	5,870	20,441
Bury	23,935	8,600	2,701	11,301
Manchester	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Oldham	34,557	11,786	6,614	18,400
Rochdale	32,691	11,931	6,110	18,041
Salford	32,190	11,887	7,749	19,636
Stockport	40,727	13,462	4,089	17,551
Tameside	31,118	12,024	4,697	16,721
Trafford	36,047	9,792	3,382	13,174
Wigan	46,618	15,812	6,243	22,055
Knowsley	22,776	3,113	8,827	11,940
Liverpool	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
St. Helens	27,505	11,198	4,561	15,759
Sefton	38,620	11,184	6,739	17,923
Wirral	49,117	15,360	10,515	25,875
Barnsley	28,872	13,761	4,673	18,434
Doncaster	42,525	21,473	8,735	29,208
Rotherham	37,337	12,757	6,260	19,017
Sheffield	60,406	20,784	11,719	32,503
Gateshead	25,147	9,144	5,121	14,307

LEA	Present	Taking paid meals	Taking free meals	Total taking meals
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	34,794	10,550	10,579	21,129
North Tyneside	27,094	12,157	4,833	16,990
South Tyneside	22,709	8,052	4,900	12,952
Sunderland	44,228	15,434	9,981	25,415
Birmingham	149,126	41,522	39,275	80,797
Coventry	42,158	9,832	8,371	18,203
Dudley	37,636	10,059	4,748	14,807
Sandwell	43,209	12,665	8,274	20,939
Solihull	29,563	10,157	2,857	13,014
Walsall	40,391	15,437	7,402	22,839
Wolverhampton	36,008	6,075	6,534	12,609
Bradford	72,930	25,277	15,334	40,611
Calderdale	28,729	11,783	3,718	15,481
Kirklees	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Leeds	92,660	37,662	13,648	51,310
Wakefield	42,612	20,657	5,886	26,543
Avon	121,886	35,946	12,886	48,832
Bedfordshire	74,096	28,678	6,929	35,607
Berkshire	92,750	33,407	4,532	37,939
Buckinghamshire	80,945	6,087	3,160	9,247
Cambridgeshire	89,079	23,717	5,659	29,376
Cheshire	133,800	49,470	14,880	64,350
Cleveland	84,283	35,839	21,012	56,851
Cornwall	60,976	24,791	5,508	30,299
Cumbria	66,533	32,432	6,225	38,657
Derbyshire	128,699	80,429	13,574	94,003
Devon	108,956	44,464	11,959	56,423
Dorset	71,944	12,475	3,180	15,655
Durham	82,556	37,914	13,349	51,263
East Sussex	74,451	25,354	5,961	31,315
Essex	198,213	58,693	12,959	71,652
Gloucestershire	67,305	15,483	4,625	20,108
Hampshire	188,331	45,895	12,434	58,329
Hereford and Worcester	87,442	16,942	5,797	22,739
Hertfordshire	129,066	57,789	6,533	64,322
Humberside	121,489	43,609	17,518	61,127
Isle of Wight	15,147	5,305	1,582	6,887
Kent	188,044	66,023	13,099	79,122
Lancashire	193,583	70,966	26,946	97,912
Leicestershire	124,901	39,564	11,146	50,710
Lincolnshire	75,177	12,857	4,521	17,378
Norfolk	91,732	24,505	8,590	33,095
Northamptonshire	86,097	22,895	6,221	29,116
Northumberland	44,561	19,914	4,322	24,236
North Yorkshire	87,435	38,181	5,521	43,702
Nottinghamshire	131,941	44,888	18,419	63,307
Oxfordshire	64,445	24,327	3,108	27,435
Shropshire	54,985	22,721	5,787	28,508
Somerset	57,623	19,777	3,269	23,046
Staffordshire	141,700	43,729	13,834	57,563
Suffolk	79,147	31,618	5,335	36,953
Surrey	105,386	43,443	3,855	47,298
Warwickshire	65,021	18,552	4,732	23,284
West Sussex	91,365	33,067	3,347	36,414
Wiltshire	70,895	22,456	3,878	26,334
Isles of Scilly	110	6	1	7

WALES

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Peter Walker: The details are as follows:

(a) Total number in support grades: 111½.

(b) Two vacancies—both in London and vacant for over three months. However, following recent selection interviews it is hoped to fill these shortly.

(c) 7 casual appointments.

(d) The average number of hours overtime worked each week by each member of the Support Grade structure in the Welsh Office:—

London	6 hours
Elsewhere	0·5 hours

National Parks

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has had any discussions with, or representations from, county councils in Wales, or other interested bodies, concerning the future of the national parks in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None; but matters relating to future developments and to the planning system within national parks are frequently the subject of representations to Ministers by a variety of bodies.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings (Staff)

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed answering on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, what staff of the House are employed in the House when sittings go beyond 10 pm.

Mr. Beith: 128 staff from various Departments are on duty on any one night as a direct consequence of the House sitting after 10 pm.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Elections (Proportional Representation)

95. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider introducing a system of proportional representation for elections to those directly elected bodies for which he is responsible.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no plans to introduce a system of proportional representation for elections to local government councils.

Motor Vehicle Offences

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of all circulars he has issued about the operation of section 37 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, within the last six months.

Mr. John Patten: Copies of Home Office circular number 86/88 and the second commencement order have been placed in the Library.

Grand National

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many jockeys have been injured while riding a horse in the Grand National at Aintree racecourse in the last nine years;

(2) how many jockeys have been permanently maimed after sustaining injuries while riding a horse in the Grand National at Aintree racecourse since 1959;

(3) how many jockeys have been killed during, or as a result of riding a horse, in the Grand National at the Aintree racecourse since 1959;

(4) how many horses have been killed during, or as a result of running in, the Grand National at Aintree racecouse since 1980.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office does not obtain or record information about injuries incurred in horseracing. But the Jockey Club has kindly provided the four numbers requested, as follows: 5; 0; 0; 4.

Chief Superintendent Kenneth Etheridge (Inquiry)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement as to the most recent inquiry carried out in the case of former Chief Superintendent Kenneth Etheridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that the most recent inquiry was in 1977, when an investigation was carried out into allegations against a number of officers, including Mr. Etheridge. No formal disciplinary proceedings were taken against any officer as a result of that inquiry.

Lotteries

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if legal proceedings will be taken against any seller or promoter of West German lottery tickets in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the Government propose to introduce legislation to clarify the legal position with regard to the selling of non-British lottery tickets within the United Kingdom prior to 31 December 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is an offence under section 2 of the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976 to bring foreign lottery tickets into Great Britain for the purpose of their sale, distribution or advertisement; we have no reason to believe that the position will be affected by the advent of the single European market in 1992. We have no plans to introduce legislation to amend the 1976 Act.

Any decision on whether to institute proceedings in respect of an alleged offence under the 1976 Act is a matter for individual chief officers of police. The Crown Prosecution Service is then responsible for deciding independently whether the case should be prosecuted in the courts.

Saudi Arabia (Visit)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whom he met and what was discussed on his recent visit to Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Hurd: I had a number of meetings with senior members of the Saudi Arabian Government and discussed the scope of intensifying the level of co-operation between this country and Saudi Arabia in a number of fields, including terrorism, drugs, organised crime and police training. I signed a memorandum of understanding with the Saudi Arabian Government to facilitate closer co-operation on these issues.

Police (Mutual Assistance)

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements exist for co-ordinating requests from chief officers of police for mutual aid assistance from other forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Mutual aid between police forces has for many years been a feature of British policing. Standing local arrangements for mutual aid are often used and do not require central co-ordination. When the demands on manpower or other resources are such that these arrangements are unlikely to be adequate, requests for assistance may be co-ordinated nationally by the mutual aid co-ordination centre (MACC) which was previously known as the national reporting centre.

The centre is activated and controlled by the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers and not by the Home Office. Day-to-day operations are the responsibility of an officer of deputy chief constable rank, assisted by supporting staff. When the MACC is in operation, as at all other times, the direction and control of police operations

within a force area, including the control of officers provided under mutual aid, is the responsibility of the chief officer of police for that area. The MACC is responsible for co-ordinating requests from chief officers: it does not have the power to take the initiative in moving police officers from one force area to another.

The Home Office is today issuing a circular to chief officers of police and police authorities about the mutual aid co-ordination centre. I have placed a copy in the Library.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Marre Committee

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General from what outside sources with practical experience of the subjects considered by the Marre committee advice has been sought in the preparation of the Government's response to the Marre committee; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Marre committee was set up by the Bar and the Law Society and reported directly to them. The three Green Papers laid before Parliament on 25 January 1989 contain the Government's own provisional proposals relating to the requirements for carrying out in the future the work presently conducted by the legal profession; and are not a response to the Marre committee's report.

Baby C

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will seek the permission of the Court of Appeal to place in the Libarary a copy of the medical report considered in the recent Baby C case.

The Attorney-General: No.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Business Investment

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the growth of business investment in the economy.

Mr. Major: The latest figures show that business investment was 14·3 per cent. higher in real terms in 1988 than in 1987.

Economic Data

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he proposes to take to improve the quality of economic statistical data published by his Department.

Mr. Major: The Treasury, Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue are currently involved, with the Central Statistical Office and other departments, in implementing specific recommendations on improving the quality of Government economic statistics included in the recent scrutiny report. The report, copies of which are available in the Library, also made recommendations about the inter-departmental arrangements for the production of Government economic statistics. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 5 April at columns 190-91, the establishment of a separate Government Department, responsible to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, bringing together the work of the Central Statistical Office, the Business Statistics Office and some parts of the statistical work of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Employment. These changes are designed to achieve a significant improvement in the quality and relevance of Government economic statistics.

Customs and Excise Management Act 1979

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the commissioners of Customs and Excise will disclose particulars of cases where proceedings for offences are compounded under section 152 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

Mr. Lilley: Section 152 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 is the most recent re-enactment of the commissioners' long-standing power to compound proceedings, that is to offer an alleged offender the option of paying a penalty out of court rather than be prosecuted. This power is used to resolve the majority of customs or excise offences, and enables them to be dealt with efficiently and effectively without burdening the courts or tying up Customs staff in lengthy court hearings. Hitherto, details of compounded settlements have not usually been made public.

The commissioners, having reviewed their policy on disclosure of compounded settlements, have decided that in respect of settlements made on or after 1 June 1989, details will be disclosed in the following circumstances:

It will be the Commissioners' invariable practice to disclose details

(a) to other Government Departments whose statutory responsibilities are directly affected; and

(b) to the courts for sentencing purposes after conviction, in cases where there has been an earlier compounded settlement for a similar matter within the time limits specified for offences by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

The commissioners will also disclose compounded settlements under two other circumstances

(c) to employers when it is apparent that

(i) the nature of the employment has facilitated the offence; or

(ii) where drugs offences or indications of serious alcohol abuse are involved, the nature of the employment or duties requires a high degree of unimpaired judgement or faculties.

(d) in response to enquiries from Parliament or the media about cases which have excited public attention, if disclosure is considered to be in the public interest.

In all cases, persons considering an offer to compound for an alleged offence will be warned when the offer is made that details of the settlement may be disclosed in the circumstances set out at *(a)* to *(d)* above.

The commissioners have considered the recommendation of Lord Keith of Kinkel's committee on the "Enforcement Powers of the Revenue Departments" (Cmnd. 9440), that the names of all persons making compounded settlements and particulars of the settlements should be published, subject to discretion to withhold the names of persons making full spontaneous voluntary disclosure of their offences. The policy now to be adopted reflects the commissioners' conclusion that, other than in the particular circumstances already described, it would

not be equitable or make the best use of their resources or those of the courts to depart from the present general principle of non-disclosure. The commissioners' general policy of non-disclosure of details of their dealings in individual cases will therefore continue to apply to cases which do not come within the circumstances described above.

I am satisfied with this outcome of the commissioners' review.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any contingency measures to prevent damaging financial upheavals in the event of incorrect retail prices index figures being published as a result of unauthorised penetration of the computer systems.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment on security of RPI computer systems. It is not our practice to comment on contingency plans.

SCOTLAND

Home Improvements

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, giving the relevant statutory references, the home improvement grant orders currently in operation; and if he will indicate against each the policy objective, the level of grant, the amount of expenditure incurred each year of operation and the number of homes estimated to be improved.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The primary objective of home improvement grants is to facilitate the improvement and repair of the existing private sector housing stock. The information available, from 1982 onwards, is given in the table. The statutory references are to the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987.

	Section 236 Improvement Expenditure		Section 238 Conversion Expenditure		Section 244 Provision of standard amenities			Section 248 Repairs Expenditure		
	[1]Maximum level of grant per cent.	£ million	Number of dwellings	Maximum level of grant per cent.	£ million	No. of dwellings	[2]Maximum level of grant per cent.	£ million	Number of dwellings	[1]Maximum level of grant per cent.	£ million	Number of dwellings
1982	50/75/90	32·95	7,302	50	2·29	297	90	0·36	313	90	6·53	7,892
1983	50/75/90	51·11	8,304	50	3·52	412	90	0·80	423	90	40·60	24,707
1984	50/75/90	49·90	9,057	50	4·42	611	90/50	2·66	1,185	[3]90/50	69·99	30,827
1985	50/75/90	43·95	7,305	50	5·47	804	50	2·50	1,242	50	62·63	20,367
1986	50/75/90	46·29	10,497	50	3·21	792	50	1·33	739	50	64·77	19,426
1987	50/75/90	51·65	10,729	50	2·68	616	50	0·94	580	50	55·99	18,783
1988	50/75/90	57·77	10,019	50	4·39	818	50	0·53	353	50	74·58	19,942

[1] Depending on condition of dwelling and financial circumstances of owner.
[2] Temporary rate of 90 per cent. available in respect of applications made between 13 April 1982 and 31 March 1984.
[3] From 1 April 1984 rate for replacement of lead plumbing is 75 per cent.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there are grant schemes available to council house tenants for home improvements which they can take up independently of their council landlord.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: House improvement and repairs grants are, in principle, available to all tenants, although they may be given only with the approval of the local authority, both as landlord and as grant-giving authority.

Riverside Tenants' Hall

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has received any request to continue with a central Government contribution to the Riverside tenants' hall, Govan.

Mr. Lang: The Riverside tenants' hall in Govan has received Government support through the urban programme for the maximum period of seven years, ending in 1990. Further support from public funds is a matter for the local authority.

Rent Phasing

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what statutory authority rent phasing was operated for tenants of housing associations; for how many years it operated; and what consultations took place about its ending.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Section 58 of the Rent (Scotland) Act (which consolidated previous legislation) is the statutory authority under which rent increases for secure tenants of housing associations may be phased. These rent increases have been eligible for phasing for 16 years. Paragraphs 23 and 26 of the consultation paper "The Private Rented Sector: The Government's Legislative Proposals for Scotland", issued in November 1987, set out the Government's proposals to move towards the abolition of phasing of rent increases for both secure tenants of housing associations and private sector regulated tenants. This proposal was fully debated during the passage through Parliament of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988.

Tourism

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make a statement on the effect of section 4 financial assistance on the Scottish tourist industry.

Mr. Lang: Over the last three financial years the Scottish tourist board has approved assistance for 337 projects amounting to £12·4 million under its section 4 programme. The total private sector investment represented by these projects is £84 million.

Health Education

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the budget of the Scottish Health Education Group, formerly the Scottish Health Education Unit and Scottish Council for Health Education in each

financial year from 1978-79 to 1988-89, expressed as actual expenditure and as a percentage of the total Scottish Health Service spending in each of the specified years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Expenditure by the Scottish Health Education Group since 1978-79 is shown in the following table:

Financial year	*SHEG expenditure £000*	*Percentage of NHS expenditure in Scotland*
1978-79	1,064	0·119
1979-80	1,252	0·118
1980-81	1,540	0·115
1981-82	1,889	0·123
1982-83	2,136	0·129
1983-84	2,086	0·135
1984-85	2,799	0·147
1985-86	3,077	0·153
1986-87	3,057	0·143
1987-88	3,220	0·138
1988-89	[1]3,326	0·128

[1]Budget provision.

Cervical Cytology

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all health boards which operate a computerised call-recall cervical cytology programme for all women aged 20 to 65 years at three yearly intervals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* Borders health board.

Community Charge

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether poll tax registration officers are currently empowered to request lists of school pupils' parents names and addresses from local authority education departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* Under section 17(3)(b) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, community charges registration officers may require the regional or islands council and any district council in their registration areas to supply them with such information as they may reasonably require in connection with their functions, being information which the local authorities have in connection with any of their functions.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Farm and Horticulture Development Scheme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount, in grants, paid out by the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland, under the farm and horticulture development scheme in each of the years since 1974 to applicants from each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: Grants paid for years 1975 to 1977 are available only for Northern Ireland as a whole. Thereafter the information is not available by parliamentary constituency, but is on a county basis.

Year	*Antrim £*	*Armagh £*	*Down £*	*Fermanagh £*	*Londonderry £*	*Tyrone £*	*Total £*
1974	—	—	—	—	—	—	n/a
1975	—	—	—	—	—	—	11,600
1976	—	—	—	—	—	—	39,746
1977	—	—	—	—	—	—	21,456
1978	597,527	378,237	583,402	591,166	382,045	547,404	3,079,781
1979	1,375,719	734,757	1,004,965	1,064,884	727,903	1,323,359	6,231,587
1980	2,600,418	1,319,611	1,821,130	2,089,022	1,693,971	2,433,079	11,957,231
1981	1,935,521	949,534	1,586,863	2,117,212	1,471,686	1,761,168	9,821,984
1982	2,136,111	1,304,801	995,931	2,832,488	1,446,296	2,162,547	10,878,174
1983	1,930,281	1,180,048	916,977	1,781,689	1,320,205	1,977,257	9,106,457
1984	1,812,487	1,189,869	897,376	1,839,932	1,193,126	1,907,374	8,840,164
1985	1,155,334	725,201	398,304	1,407,510	819,351	1,393,233	5,898,933
1986	673,313	193,537	318,293	876,892	356,706	697,773	3,116,514
1987	419,535	158,386	72,294	767,866	88,016	338,492	1,844,589
1988	85,819	81,803	13,376	270,287	10,077	89,809	551,171

Pollution

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, further to his answer of 23 February, *Official Report*, column *757*, he will list the locations and nature of the water pollution incidents between September and November 1988.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is contained in the table.

Type of pollution and location	*Number*
September 1988	
Agriculture	
Beragh	2
Gortrush	1
Reaghan	1
Drumlister	1
Fintona	3
Eskra	2
Dromore	1
Plumbridge	1
Buninver	1
Newtownstewart	2
Food processing	
Doogary	2
Conneywarren	1
Sand washing	
Omagh	1
Fallaghearn	3
Carrickmore	2
Beragh	3

Type of pollution and location	Number
Sewage	
Omagh	1
Seskinore	1
Industrial	
Gortin	1
Oil	
Gortrush	2
October 1988	
Agricultural	
Dromore road, Omagh	1
Plumbridge road, Omagh	1
Tallysallagh	3
Lisnafin	1
Beltany	2
Gortin	1
Food processing	
Doogary	4
Sand washing	
Fallaghearn	3
Carrickmore	1
Sewage	
Dromore	1
Omagh	2
Knockmoyle	1
Industrial	
Greencastle	1
Oil	
Dromore	1
November 1988	
Agricultural	
Dromore	1
Gortin	1
Food processing	
Doogary	1
Sand washing	
Mountfield	1
Greencastle	3
Carrickmore	3
Omagh	4
Sewage	
Arvalee	1
Omagh	1
Knockmoyle	1
Drumquin	1
Industrial	
Ballynatubrit	1

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland where the 10 confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy were found in Northern Ireland; and what has been done to prevent further outbreaks and to uncover the causes of this disease in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: There have now been 13 confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in various parts of the Province. It would not be appropriate to identify individual producers because of the need to respect confidentiality as a normal part of the Department of Agriculture's eradication and control policy for any animal disease outbreaks.

The BSE outbreaks have been fully investigated and there is nothing to suggest that the cause is any different from that in Great Britain cases.

In order to minimise the risk of outbreaks of this disease increasing, the Southwood committee's recommendations have been implemented in full.

TRANSPORT

Trunk Roads

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his Department's standards for maintenance with respect to grass cutting, sweeping, scavenging of laybys, windblown litter and the emptying of gullies on trunk roads maintained by county councils as agents of his Department; and if he will review those standards.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Standards for litter clearance on the worst littered sections of motorways are being re-examined.

Standards for these and other routine maintenance activities are set out in the Department's code of practice for routine maintenance. A copy of the code is in the House Library. The code is kept under continual review in consultation with the Department's agents through the Standing Committee on Highway Maintenance. The application of the code is also reviewed at local level and individual standards are adjusted to meet particular circumstances.

Buses

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to how many bus routes in London have been put out to competitive tender; and what consequent cost reductions have been achieved.

Mr. Portillo: I understand from London Regional Transport that to date it has put 135 bus routes out to competitive tender. It estimates that this has achieved savings of around 15 per cent. of previous operating costs.

Midland Main Line

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to obtain a copy of the report by consultants commissioned by east midlands local authorities on the future of the midland main line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I have made it clear that I would be interested to see the results of the study commissioned by a group of local authorities on the future of the midland main line. It is for the local authorities to decide whether to send it to me.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Coben: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what connection the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee has with his Department; what representations he has received from the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee that concessionary fares on buses

might be means-tested in future; what other representations, including those opposed to this suggestion, he has received; what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee is a statutory body, established under the Transport Act 1985, with responsibility for giving advice to the Secretary of State on matters relating to the transport needs of disabled people. In July 1988, DPTAC submitted a report to the Secretary of State on "Finance for Extra Markets for Public Transport". One of the recommendations in this report was that local authorities should consider targeting their expenditure on concessionary fares more closely to those most in need of such benefits, including in particular those with a mobility handicap. The report did not specifically propose means-testing. We have, however, received a number of letters expressing concern that means-testing for concessionary fares might be introduced.

As the Government confirmed in their reply to the DPTAC report, it will be for local authorities to decide whether to make any changes in their present arrangements in the light of the proposals in the report.

London Buses

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the timetable he envisages for the privatisation of London Buses.

Mr. Portillo: No timetable has been set.

Vehicle Reversing (Accidents)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many reportable accidents arising from reversing vehicles have resulted in injuries and deaths for each year since 1979; if he is able to categorise these into vehicle types; and how many have taken place *(a)* on the highway and *(b)* off the highway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The tables show the total number of accidents where at least one vehicle was reversing; those where at least one of the reversing vehicles was a car; and those where at least one of the reversing vehicles was a heavy goods vehicle. Only accidents on public highways are reported to the Department.

Accidents involving reversing vehicles: GB: 1979-1987

	Severity of accidents			
	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total
1979	47	548	1,882	2,477
1980	34	517	2,089	2,640
1981	37	538	2,011	2,586
1982	51	585	2,607	3,243
1983	49	598	2,792	3,439
1984	43	588	2,808	3,439
1985	35	661	2,817	3,513
1986	29	618	2,926	3,573
1987	38	612	2,919	3,569

Accidents involving reversing cars: GB: 1979-1987

	Severity of accidents			
	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total
1979	12	348	1,327	1,687
1980	14	341	1,508	1,863
1981	7	383	1,493	1,883
1982	16	400	1,952	2,368
1983	21	413	2,132	2,566
1984	15	411	2,138	2,564
1985	14	464	2,154	2,632
1986	8	442	2,262	2,712
1987	18	431	2,279	2,728

Accidents involving reversing HGVs: GB: 1979-1987

	Severity of accidents			
	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total
1979	18	71	188	277
1980	9	73	156	238
1981	16	54	166	236
1982	21	63	192	276
1983	12	61	172	245
1984	18	61	195	274
1985	11	49	168	228
1986	8	56	170	234
1987	12	60	171	243

Vehicle Reversing Equipment

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many European Community countries require reversing safety systems to be fitted on vehicles;

(2) if he has any plans to introduce legislation requiring reversing safety systems to be fitted on all new vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if in the light of the mounting level of accidents caused while vehicles are reversing, he will consider requiring large commercial vehicles to be fitted with the latest technology to enable obstacles to be detected in the path of a reversing vehicle.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have no plans to introduce legislation requiring any class of vehicle to be fitted with reversing safety systems. We know of no such legislation in any member state of the European Community.

Audible reversing alarms are permitted to be used on the road as a safety aid on buses, goods vehicles over 2 tonnes gross weight, refuse vehicles, engineering plant and works trucks.

There are very few serious injury accidents involving vehicles in reverse gear. Most drivers follow the very clear advice given in the "Highway Code."

Road Assessment Proposals

93. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he is having on the road assessment proposals for London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The consultants for the London assessment studies are currently assessing and testing a wide range of options. These do not constitute new proposals by the Department for roads or rail routes.

In my many discussions with hon. Members, councillors, and local groups I have taken the opportunity to correct misconceptions about the status of the studies and counter the scare stories about new motorways all over London.

In particular, I have been discussing the inaccuracies and misleading statements associated with a demonstration on 21 April.

Each year in London, nearly 500 people die and 50,000 are injured on London's roads. Both public and private transport assessments should help to cut this toll.

Shipping Accidents (Pollution)

94. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's role in minimising the effect of pollution after accidents at sea.

Mr. Portillo: The Department of Transport, through its marine pollution control unit exercises the responsibility accepted by Government in 1969 following the Torrey Canyon disaster, for dealing with pollution at sea arising from a shipping accident.

Contracted aerial and vessel dispersant spraying resources, oil recovery equipment or cargo transfer equipment is deployed, as both necessary and practicable, for the clean-up at sea of oil from an accident which threatens United Kingdom coastal, fishery, seabird, ecological amenity or other interests.

The Secretary of State has wide statutory powers to give directions or to take direct action to counter pollution following marine accidents. These extend from directing the owner of a ship, the master or the salvor in possession to take or refrain from taking action of any kind whatsoever, to taking control of the ship or sinking or destroying it.

Traffic Management (Greater London)

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria have been adopted by the unit of his Department concerned with traffic management in Greater London for substitution of automatic, or semi-automatic, traffic signals by police on the occasion of routine maintenance works at critical locations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: During the routine maintenance works at critical locations, permanent traffic signals are maintained wherever possible. Manual traffic control is provided by police officers or traffic wardens when signals are disconnected for short periods. Where a safe electricity supply exists, temporary signals can be provided if work is likely to take longer than one week.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the arrangements made for traffic control in East India Dock road adjacent to the northern entrance of the Blackwall tunnel over the weekend of 15 and 16 April.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There were some delays on the A13 and for traffic leaving the Blackwall tunnel on 15 and 16 April. The immediate cause was work on East India Dock road to construct an additional lane to improve access from the A13 to the Isle of Dogs.

Advance notice of the roadworks was given to motoring information services. The police were fully involved. We are satisfied that traffic management at this difficult site has been organised as well as the limitations allow.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what study has been made by his Department, or what conclusions he has reached, concerning the effect on traffic flows of one-person operated buses in Greater London; what effects he expects on traffic flow from the extension of one-person operations to bus routes presently using a crew of two; what advice or instructions he has given to London Regional Transport or London Buses Limited in respect of this policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The statutory duty to provide bus services in London lies with London Regional Transport and it is for it and its subsidiary, London Buses Ltd., to determine the method of operation, having due regard to efficiency, economy and safety. They take into account boarding times and congestion effects in their appraisal of conversions to one-person-operation. I understand they have no plans for any significant increase in the proportion of routes served by one-person-operated buses.

Road Accidents

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal accidents involving heavy goods vehicles and long distance lorry drivers for each year from 1979 to the last available year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The table shows the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents involving heavy goods vehicles for each year from 1979 to 1987.

Total fatal and non-fatal accidents involving heavy goods vehicles: Great Britain: 1979-1987

	Fatal	*Non-fatal*	*Total*
1979	940	15,531	16,471
1980	782	13,335	14,117
1981	761	12,522	13,283
1982	786	12,520	13,306
1983	722	11,606	12,328
1984	777	12,173	12,950
1985	728	12,345	13,073
1986	794	12,635	13,429
1987	776	12,866	13,642

We cannot distinguish from the Stats19 accident report form whether the driver is a long-distance driver or not.

Road Junction (Walton on Thames)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the proposed Surrey county council (No. 5) CPO (1988) for the junction of the A244/C155/D3830 at Walton on Thames.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are two outstanding objections which are being considered.

TGV Atlantique Line

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will request a copy of the report from SNCF on noise resulting from its surveys of the TGV Atlantique line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* I understand that British Rail has a copy of the report which we believe my hon. Friend has in mind. In drawing up a national noise standard we shall wish to be aware of any standards adopted elsewhere, even where trains run much faster than BR plans for the United Kingdom.

Channel Tunnel

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of the options outlined in the South Circular assessment study on the projected increase in freight traffic on the south London rail link from the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* Assessment of options is a matter for the study consultants. They are discussing the potential impact of options with the transport operators.

EMPLOYMENT

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the effect of the increase of petrol prices on the prices index over the past 12 months.

Mr. Lee: Over the 12 months ending in March 1989 the retail prices index increased by 7·9 per cent. The increase in petrol prices over the same period contributed approximately one fifth of one percentage point to this increase.

Coal Industry

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many miners he estimates are or have been exposed to noise levels above 90 dBA during the past 10 years; and what is his estimate of the proportion of those so exposed who are likely to suffer hearing damage.

Mr. Nicholls: Information regarding the number of miners who have been exposed to these noise levels is not available.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been employed as contractors for or on behalf of British Coal in each of the past five years; and what proportion of these individuals have suffered injury in each of those years.

Mr. Nicholls: This information is not available and could only be obtained, if at all, at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if dust levels experienced in underground operations have increased in recent years.

Mr. Nicholls: Since 1977-78 British Coal's annual progress report on respirable dust shows a downward trend in the average national dust levels. However, in 1987-88 there was a small increase of 3·8 per cent. over 1986-87 levels. Cutting coal at the face is by far the major generator of dust in mining operations and since 1985-86 the average daily output per coal face has risen by 39 per cent.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of underground fires recorded at collieries during each year since 1979 and the number of those associated with conveyors.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is set out in the table.

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984-85*[1]	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Outbreak of fire below ground and withdrawal of men due to smoke and other signs of fire	68	72	72	77	66	46	77	58	72	52
Number associated with conveyors	17	28	20	30	24	[2]—	31	25	34	28

[1] 15-month period January 1984-March 1985, including the period of industrial dispute.
[2] Not known.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the proportion of miners who suffered disability after working underground for 25 years or more.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the rate of serious injury among mine workers and the proportion of the labour force this represented in *(a)* 1968, *(b)* 1978 and *(c)* 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is supplied in the table.

The rate of serious injury among mine workers is calculated per 100,000 manshifts worked.

Year	*Serious injuries*	*Porportion of labour force represented*
1968	1·07	1:430
1978	0·99	1:502
1988-89[1]	3·35	1:127

[1] Provisional.
Source: British Coal Corporation and Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice he has been given by Her Majesty's inspectors in regard to the use of roof bolts in underground mining operations.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has not received any advice from the Health and Safety Executive on this subject.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of accidents involving major injury have occurred in the last hour of the working shift in underground employment.

Mr. Nicholls: The information on accident rates does not include details of the relative time in a shift when an accident occurred. However, British Coal conducted a 12-month survey on this topic from April 1986 to April 1987. This showed that of the total of 993 major accidents in that period only 33 occurred in the last hour of a shift. This is less than 4 per cent. of the total.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what duties he expects to be carried out by the proposed pit supervisors; and what differences will exist in practice and statutory requirement in comparison with those currently exercised by colliery deputies.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend understands that the Health and Safety Commission is currently considering proposals relating to the management and administration of health and safety at mines. Because the proposals are still in a formative stage it is not possible now to state what duties will be carried out by pit supervisors, nor how the future role of deputies will differ from their present role, if at all.

Health and Safety

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East on 19 April, if he will list those industries in which he estimates there is a significant number of accidents which are unreported; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: All cases of fatal injury in the course of work activity are reported to the enforcement authorities. It is not known what proportion of other reportable injuries go unreported, nor is there any firm evidence to suggest that the problem is more acute in certain industries. There are some indications, however, that the agricultural, construction and service sector are subject to significantly more under-reporting than the best estimate of 50 per cent. for employees in all industries and services.

Employees (Public Duties)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures are being taken to ensure that employees are allowed time off for public duties under sections 29, 30 and 32 of the Employment Protection Act 1978, as amended by the Employment Act 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: An employee may present a complaint to an industrial tribunal that he has not been permitted to take time off. The services of ACAS are also available. An explanatory booklet may be obtained from offices of the Department.

Action for Jobs Programme

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations have been received from *(a)* trades unions representing Government information officers and *(b)* individual officials, concerning the preparation and dissemination of material relating to the action for jobs programme.

Mr. Cope: I have no record of any such representations.

ENVIRONMENT

Community Charge

13. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the cost of implementing the community charge in England.

Mr. Gummer: Our estimate of the costs, for both capital and revenue expenditure, of implementing the community charge in 1989-90 in England, based on the Price Waterhouse report, is between £209 million (if all authorities work as efficiently as the most efficient in their category) and £277 million (if authorities maintain their current efficiency). These estimates were at November 1987 prices.

18. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would be the average community charge in each local authority in 1989-90; and if he will make figures available arranged by reference to the controlling party in each such authority.

Mr. Gummer: Illustrative 1989-90 community charges will be published once the data needed from local authorities have been received and analysed. To help my hon. Friend, we shall include details of the controlling parties, drawn from the standard reference works.

23. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish tables showing the community charge in each local authority area if introduced in 1989-90.

Mr. Gummer: Illustrative 1989-90 community charges will be published once data needed from local authorities have been received and analysed.

45. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has made available to explain the workings of the community charge to the general public.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend has issued a general booklet entitled "You and the community charge: your step by step guide" explaining the whole community charge system. He is also publishing six supplementary leaflets on individual aspects of the community charge. One of these, on exemptions, is already available. The others will cover rebates, the appeal system, the collective community charge, students and the community charge, and second homes. These will be issued over the next few weeks. All of these publications are being made available on request free of charge. In addition my right hon. Friend will send a short leaflet on the community charge to every household in England in May.

49. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would be the average community charge if implemented on 1 April 1989.

64. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish exemplifications showing what the community charge would have been if introduced on 1 April 1989.

Mr. Gummer: Illustrative 1989-90 community charges will be published once data needed from local authorities have been received and analysed.

59. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Audit Commission's assessment of the level of benefits to be derived by local authorities from the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission has made no such assessment.

65. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the

Government's planned publicity campaign for the commencement of community charge registration in England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answers which my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 20 January and 17 April this year.

67. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has made any recent assessment of the level of inability to pay the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The community charge is designed to reflect ability to pay. Rebates of up to 80 per cent. of the charge will be available to those on low incomes, and for those on the lowest incomes, income support will include an amount specifically to help with the remaining 20 per cent.

79. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to exempt severe dementia sufferers from payment of the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: I have no plans to do so and will write to the hon. Member giving my reasons.

Petrol

14. **Mr. Heddle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of the current level of duty differential between leaded and unleaded petrol on sales of unleaded petrol.

21. **Mr. Rost:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of demand for unleaded petrol in *(a)* January 1987 and *(b)* the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Uptake figures for the first full month after the Budget increase in duty differential in favour of unleaded petrol will not be available until the end of April. In the month to mid-March unleaded petrol accounted for 6·4 per cent. of the market. I understand from the United Kingdom Petroleum Industries Association that its provisional figures for the whole of March show a market share (on a slightly different basis) of 9·3 per cent. This amounts to more than a hundredfold increase since figures were first made available in April 1987.

26. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of garages in England now stock unleaded petrol.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There has been a tenfold increase in outlets for unleaded petrol since March of last year and the United Kingdom Petroleum Industry Association advises me that 38 per cent. of filling stations now stock the fuel.

76. **Mr. Neil Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of demand for unleaded petrol at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) today.

Bristol Channel (Pollution)

15. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the position over pollution from existing and planned new sewerage outlets into the Bristol channel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Nineteen bathing waters along the Bristol channel coast are identified under the EEC bathing water directive. In the 1988 bathing water season, 10 of these met the directive's mandatory coliform standards. The existing sewerage outlets are operating satisfactorily and a number of new schemes are planned which will bring about local improvements to water quality in the Bristol channel.

Housing

16. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last made a speech outlining his Department's plans for improving housing in rural areas.

Mr. Ridley: My ministerial colleagues and I frequently refer in speeches to our policies of increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural areas.

22. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the housing completion figure for 1979 in the public and private sectors; and what is the latest available figure.

Mr. Trippier: In 1979, 91,100 public sector and 118,400 private sector dwellings were completed in England. Provisional figures for 1988 are 24,800 and 159,900 respectively.

Urban Development Corporations

17. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which urban development corporations have consulted the local authorities in their area on their budget for 1989-90.

Mr. Ridley: Consultation on UDC budgets is not appropriate: their money is voted by Parliament. UDCs are required, however, to draw up a code of practice as to consultation with the local authorities in their areas on the exercise of their powers.

39. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which urban development corporations have established procedures for meeting local community organisations.

Mr. Trippier: All UDCs except central Manchester and Bristol have developed arrangements for liaising with community organisations. Central Manchester and Bristol are still formulating their arrangements.

68. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether it is his intention that urban development corporations should seek to agree a set of objectives about regeneration with local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Government encourage co-operation between urban development corporations and local authorities to help UDCs secure the regeneration of their designated areas. UDCs are required, under section 140 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, to prepare codes of practice as to consultation with their local authorities.

73. **Mr. Rees:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which urban development corporations use existing local plans as a basis for undertaking their regeneration task.

Mr. Ridley: There are local plans covering parts of all urban development areas, except Trafford park. UDCs take them into account when preparing strategies for the regeneration of their areas.

81. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which urban development corporations open their planning committees to the public.

Mr. Trippier: London Docklands development corporation holds its planning meetings in public. We understand Bristol and Sheffield development corporations also intend to do so.

Council Tenants (Three Rivers)

19. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the decision of Three Rivers council tenants to reject a transfer to Chess Valley housing association; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I have received no such representations.

Football Spectators Bill

24. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the Football Spectators Bill.

Mr. Moynihan: By 17 April I had received 59 representations in favour and 3,991 against the Football Spectators Bill.

Local Authority Expenditure

25. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated net saving in terms of public expenditure as a result of the measures taken over the past 10 years to restrict expenditure by local authorities.

Mr. Gummer: We have taken a number of measures to restrict expenditure by local authorities which have resulted in substantial savings over the past 10 years.

Drinking Water

27. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to ensure that the Thames water authority supplies a high quality standard of drinking water after privatisation.

Mr. Moynihan: The Water Bill contains proposals for a comprehensive new system for safeguarding and improving the quality of water supplies. This will include tight quality standards, frequent sampling, the establishment of a drinking water quality inspectorate, and requirements to provide full information to consumers on the quality of water they receive.

Water Privatisation

28. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for the debt incurred on and management of Kielder water in relation to privatisation of the Northumbrian water authority.

Mr. Moynihan: The National Rivers Authority will enter into an agreement with Northumbrian water authority's successor company to deal with the operation of Kielder as a water resource asset. Under the terms of clause 83 of the Water Bill, there will be a general debt restructuring of all water authorities prior to flotation.

51. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the proposed safeguards for consumers contained in the proposals for the privatisation of the water industry.

Mr. Howard: After privatisation our comprehensive new charter for customers would for the first time give consumers rights on the quality of water they drink, the charges they pay, and the standard of service they receive. As part of this I am pleased to announce that public consultation today begins on the draft regulations for the guaranteed standards scheme. This is a no nonsense, no quibble scheme providing a spur to management to ensure the best commercial practices. Domestic customers will be automatically entitled to a payment or credit of £5 for every day, or each occasion, on which a breach of one of the standards of service occurs. This will avoid the frustration customers at present experience because they cannot obtain any compensation in such cases.

The scheme covers:

—delays beyond the period notified by the company for restoring water supplies following a planned interruption of supply;

—delays of more than 24 hours in restoring water supply following an unplanned interruption which has been notified to the company (72 hours in the case of a burst strategic main);

—appointments which are not kept on the day specified by the company to the customer;

—failure to provide a substantive answer to written enquiries about bills, or requests for alternative methods of payment within 20 and 10 working days respectively;

—failure to answer written complaints about water supply or sewerage services by providing an answer within 10 working days, and a substantive answer within 20 working days if the matter requires a site inspection or further investigations.

I will place copies of the draft regulations of the guaranteed standards scheme in the House Library along with copies of the Government's leaflet "Customer Standards and Consumer Rights".

Litter

29. **Mr. Ken Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for ensuring that local authorities carry out effectively their duties on litter.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are considering placing a duty on local authorities to clean public areas, having regard to codes of practice which the Government would issue. We are also looking at ways of enabling local authorities to enforce the Litter Act more effectively.

37. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of his campaign to reduce litter in the streets.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The clean nineties campaign launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and being developed by the Tidy Britain group is proceeding well. I and other Ministers have been associated with projects and other activities designed to increase public awareness of the problem and involvement in solutions.

We expect the Tidy Britain group's projects to result in codes of practice, setting standards of cleanliness, in time for the launch of Tidy Britain Year-1990.

We will shortly be reviewing the City of Westminster's fixed penalty scheme for littering to see whether it should be extended nationally. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport launched a £1 million litter clearing campaign on 17 March and is monitoring the standards in his Department's code of practice for routine maintenance of roads.

Association of District Councils

30. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Association of District Councils; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend last met representatives of the local associations, including the Association of District Councils, on 29 November 1988. The subjects discussed were the new system of local authority capital finance and the Government's proposals for the treatment of local authorities interests in companies.

Rates

31. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those district councils which have increased their rates by 50 per cent. in the last year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are two authorities: Basildon increased its rates by 57·2 per cent. in 1989-90; Brighton increased its rates by 56·7 per cent. in 1989-90.

Chlorofluorocarbons

32. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment at what date he expects the United Kingdom to meet the Montreal protocol target of a 50 per cent. reduction in the use of chlorofluorocarbons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Montreal protocol requires cuts of 50 per cent. in the consumption of cholorofluorocarbons (CFCs) by 1999. We expect this to have been achieved by the United Kingdom by the end of this year, 10 years ahead of schedule.

61. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he intends to take to diminish the use and encourage the recycling and safe disposal of chlorofluorocarbons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Environment Council of the European Community has, in response to a United Kingdom initiative, called for the Montreal protocol to be strengthened so as to require production and consumption of chlorofluorocarbons to be reduced by 85 per cent. as quickly as possible with a view to their elimination by the end of the century. We shall be pressing for this to be agreed as the protocol is reviewed over the next 12 months. Such a change would give further impetus to the search for and application of substitutes and to the recycling of existing CFCs. The question of the safe destruction of CFCs will be considered by the parties to the Montreal protocol at their first meeting in Helsinki next month.

Competitive Tendering

33. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the benefits to be gained by local authorities from competitive tendering in 1989-90.

Mr. Gummer: The Department will shortly be letting a research contract to monitor and evaluate the effects of the competition provisions of the Local Government Act 1988. The statutory deadline for the first round of services to be exposed to competition is 1 August 1989. Previous studies have therefore necessarily examined the effects of voluntary competition; these have found savings of 20 to 30 per cent. of previous costs without any reduction in standards.

European Soccer

34. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have taken place between the Minister responsible for sport and his European counterparts regarding the readmittance of English clubs to European soccer competition.

Mr. Moynihan: I have not discussed the re-admission of English football clubs to UEFA competitions with my European counterparts. The matter was discussed at the meeting of the Standing Committee on the European Convention on Spectator Violence on 13 and 14 April. The Standing Committee welcomed UEFA's decision to re-admit English clubs in the 1990-91 season subject to the conditions laid down by UEFA.

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the president of the Union of European Football Associations to discuss the re-entry of English football clubs to European competition.

Mr. Moynihan: I understand that the President of UEFA has said that he will seek a meeting with me next April to discuss the re-admission of English clubs to Europe in the 1990-91 season. I shall be happy to meet him.

Global Warming

35. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies his Department has undertaken to assess the effect of global warming on coastal communities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In June 1988 the Department published a series of desk studies on "Possible Impacts of Climate Change on the Natural Environment in the United Kingdom". The report identified a number of research requirements for assessing those impacts. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. Further studies are now proceeding, including studies on the implications for sea defences.

Denis Wild-type Houses

36. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in encouraging building societies to offer advances on Denis Wild-type houses.

Mr. Trippier: Good progress is being made in improving the mortgage ability of all non-traditional house types. If the hon. Member has a specific problem in mind, perhaps he would write to me.

Water Authorities

38. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairmen of the water authorities; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend and I met the chairmen of the water authorities on 24 April. Various matters of mutual interest were discussed.

Bathing Waters

40. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many bathing waters were designated for the purposes of the European bathing waters directive in *(a)* May 1979 and *(b)* May 1988.

Mr. Moynihan: No United Kingdom bathing waters had been indentified in May 1979 under the EEC bathing water directive. In May 1988, 397 coastal bathing waters had been identified. These are listed in the *Official Report* for 5 May 1988 at column *536* for Scotland, and at columns *571-577* for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Widdecombe Report

41. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he is making on implementing those recommendations of the Widdecombe report which do not require primary legislation.

Mr. Gummer: We have established join working groups with the local authority associations to prepare a new set of model standing orders for local authorities; and to revise the national code of local government conduct.

Empty Properties

42. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the number of empty residential properties in the private sector in England and Wales.

82. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the figures for empty residential properties in the private sector in Inner London for April 1987 and April 1988.

Mr. Trippier: This information is reported by English local authorities in their annual housing investment programme returns (HIPI). It is shown at column A84 of "Grossed Estimates—HIPI" for 1987 and 1988. Copies of these documents are in the Library.

For Welsh figures, I refer the hon. Member for Manchester, Central to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

River Pollution

43. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about river pollution in Leicestershire.

Mr. Howard: River water quality in Leicestershire is generally of a high standard with most rivers being of good or fair quality. Some stretches of river in the Soar catchment, at present not meeting their quality objectives, will be improved by 1992 as a result of planned capital expenditure by Severn-Trent water authority to improve unsatisfactory sewage treatment works.

86. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the system of open regulation of river pollution was introduced.

Mr. Howard: Since 31 July 1985, the water authorities have kept public registers with details of applications for, and consents granted in respect of, discharges of effluent, both by the authorities themselves and by others. The registers also contain details of the results of the water authorities' sampling of effluent quality together with the results of their regular monitoring programmes for rivers and estuaries and coastal waters. The registers are kept in accordance with the Control of Pollution (Registers) Regulations 1985 and section 41 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Local Government Finance

44. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress his Department has made in evaluating a system of local government finance based on a combination of capital value tax and a local income tax.

Mr. Gummer: We published figures illustrating the possible impact of such a system on 23 June 1988. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has undertaken to provide illustrative figures for any hon. Member who asks, on the same basis as those he quoted to my hon. Friends the Members for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) and for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) on 25 January at column *1013*.

Hazardous Wastes

46. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to respond to the recent Environment Select Committee report on hazardous wastes.

77. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for an urgent response to the Environment Select Committee report on toxic and hazardous waste.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's response will be published as soon as possible.

Rating Reform

47. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would be the bill paid by a ward sister living in a typical property in Cambridge under a system of *(a)* community charge and *(b)* capital value rates plus local income tax.

Mr. Gummer: A ward sister earning £13,000 living in a property in Cambridge worth £50,000 would pay a community charge of £213 (disregarding the transitional safety net) and £465 under a system of capital value rates plus local income tax.

Homelessness

48. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest figures of households accepted as homeless by local authorities following mortgage repossession for England and Wales.

Mr. Trippier: In the quarter ending December 1988 local authorities accepted responsibility to secure accommodation for an estimated 1,800 households under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act, where the immediate reason for homelessness was mortgage arrears.

For Welsh figures, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Council House Sales

50. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that delays on processing council house sales are reduced.

Mr. Trippier: As I announced in my answer of 10 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), section 124 of the Housing Act 1988 came into force on that date. It enables tenants whose applications are delayed by the landlord to have rent payments put towards the purchase price of their home. Section 136 of the Act helps local authorities equip themselves to deal with applications by allowing them to use the proceeds of sales to meet the administrative costs.

Ozone Layer

52. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the protection of the ozone layer.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received a number of representations regarding the protection of the ozone layer.

Single People (Housing)

53. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to increase the supply of housing for single young people in metropolitan areas.

Mr. Trippier: The Government have provided for an 80 per cent. increase over the next three years in the finance available to the Housing Corporation to provide new houses to rent and to promote low-cost home ownership including shared ownership. The deregulation of new private lettings will also encourage landlords to make more homes available to rent.

Nature Conservancy Council

54. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Nature Conservancy Council to discuss environmental policies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Ministers hold regular discussions with the Nature Conservancy Council which cover a range of issues affecting policies for nature conservation and the environment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met the chairman of the council on 26 January. Both my noble Friend the Earl of Caithness and I have met the chairman and the deputy chairman at meetings held during the last three months.

Housing Action Trust

55. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the common problems identified by the consultants in proposed housing action trust areas.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's answer to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 16 March at column *322* announcing the publication of the consultants' reports on the proposed housing action trust areas. Copies of the consultants' reports on all the proposed areas were placed on that day in the Libraries of both Houses.

56. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of carrying out the consultant's report on the proposed housing action trust area in Sunderland.

Mr. Trippier: The cost of carrying out the report on the proposed Sunderland housing action trust will amount to £198,233, including VAT, when all bills have been paid. This figure covers consultants' fees and the cost of producing reports and leaflets about the proposal.

83. **Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will release the necessary funds to local authorities for improving the areas identified as potential housing action trusts.

Mr. Trippier: The Government have made extra public expenditure provision available for housing action trusts. It will be for tenants in the areas proposed for trusts to decide whether they wish my right hon. Friend to proceed with the orders necessary to set them up.

Rates

57. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average increase in domestic rates from 1 April.

80. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average increase in *(a)* domestic rates and *(b)* non-domestic rates from 1 April 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The average increase in the domestic rates of local authorities in England in 1989-90 is 9·3. The average increase in non-domestic rates is 7·8 per cent.

Sports Council

58. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Sports Council; and what subjects he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Moynihan: I shall be meeting the outgoing chairman, John Smith and the chairman designate, Peter Yarranton, during May. We will discuss a number of issues relating to sport.

Isle of Dogs (Commercial Space)

60. **Mr. Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total amount of commercial space *(a)* completed, *(b)* under construction and *(c)* with planning permission in the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone; and if he has an estimate of the total allowances they will be eligible for.

Mr. Trippier: As at 31 March the London Docklands development corporation estimated that 320,000 sq m of commercial floorspace has been constructed since 1981 with another 830,000 sq m under construction. Planning permission is not generally required in enterprise zones but the estimate of commercial floorspace committed in the Isle of Dogs EZ is a further 895,000 sq m.

Estimates of the cost of capital allowances to the Exchequer are based on the total level of investment in construction in enterprise zones and other national data; they are not available for individual zones.

Council Rents

62. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has calculated the effect on council rents of the proposals in the Local Government and Housing Bill.

Mr. Trippier: Under part VI of the Local Government and Housing Bill, local authorities will retain the responsibility for setting rents for their own properties. A number of factors can affect the levels at which councils choose to pitch their rents, including the determinations which my right hon. Friend will make each year as a basis for calculating entitlement for housing revenue account subsidy. A calculation of future rents can be made only one year at a time, when the relevant determinations have been made.

Homeless Families

63. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homeless families could be housed immediately if all void properties in the hands of local authorities were filled.

Mr. Trippier: At the latest date for which we have information, 1 April 1988, there were nearly 103,000 local authority dwellings empty in England. Of these, nearly 22,000 were available for immediate letting, and could thus, in theory, have taken every homeless family out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation twice over. However, the right dwellings are not all in the right place at the right time for homeless families. Nevertheless, it is urgent and essential for authorities to make effective use of their empty property. The new financial regime for local authority housing will increase the pressure on councils to do so.

London Housing Survey

66. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a copy of the report from the London research centre entitled "The London Housing Survey 1986-87"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Yes. The Government's housing policies and, in particular the provisions in the Housing Act 1988, which are designed to secure a greater diversity of housing supply, will address many of the issues mentioned in the report.

Control of Pollution Act

69. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the extent of implementation of the Control of Pollution Act.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The main provisions of the Act have all been implemented, with the exception of a few sections of part II which are contained in the water legislation currently before Parliament. The remaining provisions are either reserve powers or are now thought inappropriate.

Estates Programme

70. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have participated in the estates programme; at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Over 200 local authorities in England have participated in discussions and received advice under our estate action initiative and by 31 March 1989, 110 had received additional resources totalling £260 million. A further £190 million is being made available under the estate action programme in the current financial year.

Housing Corporation

71. **Mr. Samberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many regional offices of the Housing Corporation have now been established; and what resources have been committed to the corporation to ensure effective dissemination of the services available.

Mr. Trippier: The Housing Corporation has nine regional offices in England. The Government are providing grant-in-aid of £19·8 million in 1989-90 to meet the administrative costs of the corporation in carrying out its functions.

Farmland

72. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much farmland was released for private housing in *(a)* 1968, *(b)* 1978 and *(c)* 1988.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not available. I gave my hon. Friend some MAFF data for 1958-68, 1968-78 and 1978-85 in my answer to him on 14 December. My Department's land use change data, which are not comparable with the MAFF series, show that in 1985-87 the average annual area of land recorded by the Ordnance Survey as changing from agricultural to urban use in England was around 5,500 hectares, of which around 3,400 hectares were for residential use. Figures for 1988 will be published later this year.

Empty Property

74. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to bring empty residential property in the private sector into Housing Association or local authority ownership on a temporary or permanent basis to provide homes for the homeless.

Mr. Trippier: No. We believe that the changes made by the Housing Act 1988 will encourage private landlords to let currently empty property.

Football Membership Scheme

75. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the president of the Football League and the chairman of the Football Association to discuss identity cards.

Mr. Moynihan: I hope to meet the chairman of the Football Association and the president of the Football League shortly.

Water Rates

78. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the average increase in water authority and statutory water rates from 1 April.

Mr. Howard: I estimate that the average increase in all water charges is likely to be 9·8 per cent. for the water authorities and about 22 per cent. for the water companies. The average increase for all consumers is likely to be about 11 per cent. Information on the average rates levied on customers charged by rateable value is not yet available.

Housing (Transfers)

84. **Mr. Leadbitter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for transfers of housing stock he has received under the provisions of the Housing Act 1988.

Mr. Trippier: None. Responsibility for the approval of applicants for the tenants' choice provisions in part IV of the Housing Act 1988 lies in England with the Housing Corporation under its powers in section 94. Once approved, and provided the applicant has secured the necessary degree of tenant support for its application and complied with the Housing Corporation's own procedures, applications can, under section 96 of the Act, be made direct to the appropriate public sector landlord.

Rural Housing

85. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received a copy of "A Practical Guide to Providing Affordable Rural Housing" by the national agricultural centre rural trust; and if he will make a statemet.

Mr. Trippier: My noble Friend the Minister for Housing attended the launch of the guide and congratulated the rural trust on its production. He commended it to all village communities which think a rural housing association might help meet housing needs in their area.

88. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied that sufficient rented housing is available in rural areas at rents which those working in such areas can afford.

Mr. Trippier: We accept that there is a need for more affordable rented housing in some rural areas. We have therefore increased funding to the Housing Corporation to enable it to quadruple its programme of housing for rent in small villages to 1,100 houses a year. Recent changes to planning guidance, and Budget changes in the tax treatment of land given to housing associations, will also help in increasing the supply of rural housing at moderate rents.

Rents

87. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any information about changes in private sector rents since the introduction of assured tenancy provisions under the Housing Act 1988.

Mr. Trippier: The provisions have been in force only three months and it is therefore too soon to assess their impact on rent levels.

Enterprise Zones

89. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent assessment his Department has made of the operation of enterprise zones.

Mr. Trippier: A study was carried out in 1986-1987, The report, "An evaluation of the enterprise zone experiment", was published in December 1987. A series of annual monitoring reports is also available. The latest of these, "Enterprise Zone Information 1986-87", was published on 18 April. Copies of these have been placed in the Library. A final evaluation of the zones will be commissioned shortly.

Local Development Plans

90. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has been able to gauge the response by local authorities with planning responsibilities to his Department's recent encouragement towards more precisely delineated local development plans.

Mr. Chope: My general impression is that many planning authorities have responded very positively to the advice given in PPG12, and have work in hand on preparing or updating their local plans. But a period of preparation and public consultation is required before draft plans can be formally placed on deposit, and it is not possible at this stage to gauge the full impact of PPG12.

Waste Paper

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to encourage the recycling of waste paper; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what his policy is on the recycling of paper; and if he has issued any advice to councils and other public bodies on this matter.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department of the Environment is co-operating with the Department of Trade and Industry in setting up a series of seminars, involving local authorities and others to encourage paper recycling where it is economically viable. The first is in London on 3 May. We also encourage local authorities and others to use recycled paper and to recycle their own waste where economically viable. This Department has used recycled letter headed paper for some years along with paper for many other purposes which is made wholly or partly from recycled fibre.

Inner Cities (Housing)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why he decided not to proceed with the research project on housing issues in inner city areas.

Mr. Trippier: The original research proposed proved to be too wide in scope but it is hoped to include elements of it in future research work.

Rural Areas (Housing)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue guidance to planning

authorities on the effect of different forms of tenure on the availability of land for affordable housing developments in rural areas.

Mr. Trippier: No. My right hon. Friend made clear in his announcement of 3 February at columns *433-34* that planning conditions should not normally be used to impose restrictions on tenure. He emphasised that the details of arrangements to secure low cost housing for local needs are very much a matter for local decision, and that must include decisions as to what tenure or mix of tenures is appropriate to the particular circumstances of the area concerned.

Green Belt

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those parts of the metropolitan green belt with a width of less than 9 miles.

Mr. Howard: I refer my hon. Friend to the map and description of the metropolitan green belt in my Department's booklet "The Green Belts" (HMSO, October 1988), a copy of which is in the Library.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the Nature Conservancy Council, together with the bodies appointing them and details of any of their links with field sports.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Members of the Nature Conservancy Council are appointed by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment. Members are appointed to the council for the personal contribution they can make to its work. They have a wide range of expertise and interests. The current members of the council are as follows:

Sir William Wilkinson, Chairman
Sir John Burnett, Deputy Chairman
Professor John Allen
Lord Blakenham
Professor David Bowen
Lord Buxton
Mr. John Cossins
The Earl of Dalkeith
Dr. Peter Evans
Professor John Knill
Miss Audrey Lees
Sir Hector Monro
Dr. Bill Mutch
Professor Gareth Owen
Earl Peel
Mr. James Teacher
Mr. Alexander Trotter
Mr. Lindsay Waddell
Mr. William Wilder

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has issued to the Nature Conservancy Council about the conditions which should be fulfilled by the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Country Naturalist Trust for the issuing of grant-aid for the purchase of land.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the Hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 15 February at column *281*.

Peak Park

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last visited the Peak park; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I last visited the Peak District national park on 12 April.

Village Greens

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has issued to local planning authorities in respect of considering planning applications or compulsory purchase orders affecting village greens.

Mr. Ridley: I have issued no planning guidance about village greens. Appendix G to my Department's circular 6/85 refers to compulsory purchase orders affecting commons and open spaces (which can include village greens). The Department also produces an advice note on compulsory acquisition of commons and open land.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the public inquiry reports submitted to him in the last five years, where a decision was made in *(a)* under three months, *(b)* under six months, *(c)* under one year and *(d)* over one year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: Information in the form requested cannot readily be obtained. Since 1984, I and my predecessors have issued 1,711 decisions on planning appeals following a public local inquiry, and approximately 70 per cent. of those decisions were issued within three months of the inspector's report being received. In 1988-89, 81 per cent. of such decisions were issued within three months.

House of Commons

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has now completed his research into the lighting of the Chamber prior to its reconstruction in the 1940s referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) of 13 February, *Official Report, column 30*.

Mr. Chope: The research has established that, except for the first few months when gas chandeliers were used and found to be unsatisfactory, artificial light in Barry's Chamber was provided from panels in the ceiling. A report was provided last month to the Select Committee on the televising of the House and copies are being placed in the Library.

Control of Advertisements Regulations

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now give effect to the Government's proposals for amending and consolidating the Control of Advertisements Regulations.

Mr. Chope: As foreshadowed in the reply on 4 July last year, by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today laid before Parliament amending Control of Advertisements

Regulations which modernise the present regulations and introduce some carefully considered de-regulatory provisions.

Among the new provisions two categories of illuminated advertisement are being permitted without first obtaining the local planning authority's prior consent. These are small signs on "business premises" and on commercial premises in "retail parks", where the sign consists of individual characters or letters, internally illuminated. Because illuminated signs on shops and other commercial premises can sometimes be garish and unsympathetic, or may confuse passers-by, safeguards will ensure that the advertisements permitted for display will not harm amenity or put vehicle drivers or pedestrians at risk. As an additional safeguard, this type of illuminated sign will not be permitted in any conservation area, national park, area of outstanding natural beauty or area of special control of advertisements.

These regulations will provide some worthwhile relaxation of the present unnecessarily restrictive rules, while at the same time maintaining essential safeguards for the quality of the built environment.

Peak Park (Planning Applications)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications for starter homes have been refused by the Peak park planning board.

Mr. Trippier: Of the 11 planning applications for "starter homes" dealt with by the Peak park joint planning board since April 1984, five have been refused.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 27 April 1989

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

South Africa

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for his policy towards South Africa of the report on the rights of detainees and other matters, by the Black Sash women's rights group of South Africa; and if he will make arrangements for a copy of the report to be procured for his departmental library.

Mrs. Chalker: We regularly receive information on human rights issued by Black Sash. The March issue of the Black Sash magazine is devoted to an overview of the current state of human rights in South Africa. We condemn all abuses of basic human rights wherever they occur.

United Kingdom Embassies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries at present do not have a United Kingdom embassy; what is the reason for the absence; and what steps are being taken to establish an embassy in each case.

Mrs. Chalker: As all the information necessary is not immediately available, a further reply will be sent to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

India (Missiles)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made any representations to the Indian Government over the implications for stability in the sub-continent of the planned programme of flight testing the Agni intermediate range ballistic missile in Orissa state.

Mrs. Chalker: No.

Soviet Submarine (Sinking)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what detailed information was received from the Soviet Government, at what time, and through which channels, to assure Her Majesty's Government that the sinking of the Mike class Soviet nuclear submarine provided no radiological hazard to the North sea and Arctic ocean.

Mrs. Chalker: A message from Mr. Gorbachev to the Prime Minister informing her of the accident was passed on in the early hours of 8 April. In it he assured her that there was no leak of radioactivity and that none was expected. Detailed information to the same effect was passed by the Soviet permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna to that body at about 0545 BST on 8 April. This information was relayed to London through the British permanent representative's office at 0645 BST.

THE ARTS

"The Northern Region: Making Ends Meet"

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Minister for the Arts what consideration he has given to the findings of the report published by the National Campaign for the Arts "The Northern Region: Making Ends Meet;" and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* The funding of regional arts associations is a matter for the Arts Council. I understand that the chairman of the Arts Council has already written to the National Campaign for the Arts about the report.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Pension Fund

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the Government Actuary's valuation report on the parliamentary contributory pension fund will be laid before the House.

Mr. Wakeham: In accordance with section 5 of the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1972, the Government Actuary's valuation report on the parliamentary contributory pension fund is being laid before the House today. The House will have an opportunity to debate the report and the Government will not take any decision on its recommendations until after that debate. The report includes a recommendation that the standard contribution for Members should be about 20 per cent. of salary, of which the Exchequer should contribute 11 per cent., while the Member's contribution should remain at 9 per cent. This compares with the position previously when the Exchequer contribution was set at 13 per cent. with a 5 per cent. supplement, during which time a substantial surplus has built up in the fund. This surplus would by convention normally be used to reduce the employers' contribution. The Actuary therefore recommended that the Exchequer contribution from April 1989 should fall to 4·4 per cent., returning to 11 per cent. from April 1997.

NATIONAL FINANCE

"The Inland Revenue and the Taxpayer"

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he intends to initiate legislation, or consolidate legislation, as a consequence of the Board of Inland Revenue's consultative document entitled, "The Inland Revenue and The Taxpayer" published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office on behalf of the Board of Inland Revenue in December 1986.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Legislation was included in the Finance (No. 2) Act 1987 and the Finance Act 1988. Further clauses are contained in this year's Finance Bill which will substantially complete the legislation arising out of the proposals in the Inland Revenue's consultative document.

Consolidation of statute law is the responsibility of the Law Commission. A Bill consolidating the laws relating to capital allowances will be ready for introduction in the 1989-90 Session of Parliament. Work on further consolidations of tax law will then be put in hand.

Small Businesses (Tax Concessions)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in the *Official Report* the tax concessions specifically directed at small businesses since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In line with the Government's policy of encouraging enterprise, tax changes intended to benefit small businesses have been introduced in each Budget since 1979. Details are as follows:

1979 Budget

Small companies' profit limits raised to £60,000 and £100,000.

1980 Budget

Venture capital scheme introduced;

costs of raising business loan finance allowed as tax deduction against trading income;

small companies' profit limits raised to £70,000 and £130,000;

small companies' corporation tax (CT) rate reduced to 40 per cent.;

capital gains tax (CGT) exemption limit increased to £3,000;

removal of double charge to CGT and capital transfer tax (CTT) on gifts;

CTT threshold doubled to £50,000;

introduction of small workshops scheme;

relaxation of conditions for tax relief for interest paid on money borrowed for investment in, or lending to, a close company;

close company apportionment rules abolished in respect of trading income;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

percentage limit on retirement annuity relief increased and abolition of ceiling on premiums qualifying for relief;

measures to encourage employee share ownership;

easing of administrative burden on sub-contractors tax deduction scheme;

pre-trading revenue expenditure allowed as deduction against trading income.

1981 Budget

Venture capital scheme extended;

Business Start Up Scheme introduced;

small companies' profit limits raised to £80,000 and £200,000;

extension and relaxation of interest relief on money borrowed for investment in a partnership co-operative;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

threshold for tax relief on redundancy payments increased to £25,000;

introduction of pilot loan guarantee scheme.

1982 Budget

Expansion of business start up scheme;

no advance corporation tax (ACT) or income tax charge on certain purchases of own shares by unquoted trading companies;

small companies' profit limits raised to £90,000 and £225,000;

CGT exemption limit increased to £5,000 and indexed for future years;

CGT indexation of gains introduced;

CTT threshold increased to £55,000 and indexed for future years, rate bands extended;

beneficial changes to interest relief rules for investments in close companies made by working managers;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

deduction for VAT paid on supplies of services to VAT registered traders before registration;

limits of retirement annuity relief for older contributors increased;

qualifying period for tax relief for pre-trading expenditure increased to three years;

business contributions to local enterprise agencies to be tax deductible;

extension of small workshop scheme for very small workshops;

extension of pilot loan guarantee scheme.

1983 Budget

Introduction of business expansion scheme (BES);

small companies' CT rate reduced to 38 per cent.;

small companies' profit limits raised to £100,000 and £500,000;

CGT exemption limit raised in line with inflation;

CTT: threshold increased by more than inflation, longer period for paying tax on business assets without incurring interest charge;

further measures to encourage employee share ownership;

de minimis limit for assessment of investment income apportioned to members of a close company increased to £1,000;

interest relief extended to employee buy-outs;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

extension of loan guarantee scheme.

1984 Budget

small companies' CT rate reduced to 30 per cent.;

further measures to encourage employee share ownership;

CGT exemption limit raised in line with inflation;

CGT rollover and retirement reliefs extended to furnished holiday lettings—enables landlords of such properties to claim same deductions as traders;

highest rate of CTT cut to 60 per cent., rates for lifetime transfers reduced to half those on death;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

self-employed required to live in job-related accommodation given mortgage interest relief for purchase of own home elsewhere;

National insurance surcharge abolished;

relaxation of conditions for interest relief applied to employee buy outs;

Investment income surcharge abolished;

retirement relief doubled to £100,000.

1985 Budget

Tax relief on half class 4 NIC;

extension of BES;

reform of capital gains retirement relief, reducing qualifying age and introducing ill-health relief; extension of indexation to give full relief for assets held since 1982;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation, extension of bad debt relief.

1986 Budget

small companies' CT rate reduced to 29 per cent.;

BES extended and targeting improved;

Inheritance tax (IHT) replaced CTT, thereby abolishing tax charge on most lifetime gifts;

Increase in CGT small part-disposals relief unit;

VAT registration and deregistration thresholds raised broadly in line with inflation;

Enterprise allowance scheme expanded;

Employee share schemes: improved access for unquoted family companies, employee controlled companies, worker co-operatives;

Loan Guarantee Scheme extended an premium halved.

1987 Budget

Small companies' CT rate reduced to 27 per cent.;

package of measures to lighten VAT burden on small businesses including: cash accounting and annual accounting for businesses with turnover of up to £250,000, period in

which businesses obliged to register extended to 30 days, simpler schemes to be more widely available for small and medium sized retailers;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

standstill in fuel duties and most vehicle excise duty rates;

BES changes to reduce effect of investment bunching in last quarter of tax year;

small companies' rate of CGT reduced to 27 per cent. with ACT offset against liability on gains;

ceiling for capital gains retirement relief increased to £125,000;

IHT business relief increased from 30 per cent. to 50 per cent. for minority holdings over 25 per cent. in unquoted companies;

IHT threshold increased by more than inflation;

introduction of tax relief for profit related pay (PRP);

new simplified occupational pension schemes will help small employers set up own schemes;

personal pensions introduced with improved, age related contribution limits.

1988 Budget

small companies' CT rate reduced to 25 per cent.;

small compamies' CGT charges reduced to 25 per cent.;

BES targeting improved to help smaller and newer businesses;

CGT retirement relief considerably extended, 50 per cent. relief introduced for gains between £125,000 and £500,000;

CGT rollover relief extended to milk and potato quotas;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

abolition of capital duty;

major changes to rules applying to unapproved employee share schemes;

simplification of IHT: flat rate of 40 per cent., threshold increased by more than inflation;

exemption for capital gains accruing before April 1982.

In addition, the following proposals are contained in this year's Finance Bill:

small companies' profit limits raised to £150,000 and £750,000;

simplification of pensions rules and substantial increases in personal pension contribution limits;

improved tax reliefs designed to encourage employee participation in PRP and employee share schemes (including ESOPS);

abolition of close company apportionment rules;

extended relief for pre-trading expenditure;

VAT registration threshold raised broadly in line with inflation;

CGT gifts relief retained for business assets.

And, of course, small businesses will also have benefited from the major reductions in the rates of income tax since 1979.

Old Ships

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to remove the balancing charge under which a British ship owner when disposing of old ships pays to the Treasury one third of the proceeds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion. Balancing charges are made to recover tax relief for depreciation given in excess of the depreciation actually experienced. Whether such a charge needs to be made and, if so, the amount of the charge depends on the particular circumstances of each individual case.

Investment Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in tabular form the amounts invested *(a)* in United Kingdom shares and *(b)* in foreign shares by (i) pension funds, (ii) insurance companies and (iii) unit trusts for each month from January 1979 to date.

Mr. Lilley: Information on the investment of financial institutions in United Kingdom and overseas company securities is published regularly in "Financial Statistics" —for pension funds in table 7.14, for insurance companies in table 7.13, and for unit trusts in table 7.11. The figures published show the market value of investments at the end of each calendar year, and the cash value of net acquisitions (purchases less sales) in each quarter. There is no monthly information.

Gilts

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amount of Government gilt edged securities sold by unit trusts, pension funds and insurance companies in each quarter since October 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is published in "Financial Statistics"—for unit trusts in table 7.11, for pension funds in table 7.14, and for insurance companies in table 7.13.

EC Banking Directive

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in the Council of Finance Ministers in considering the second banking directive; if it is the general purpose of the draft directive that banks approved by their own state should be permitted to seek deposits, to offer loans and to engage in the full business of retail banking in another member state; and if he will make a statement on the position of Her Majesty's Government on the directive.

Mr. Lilley: The draft second banking coordination directive, which the Government have welcomed in principle as an important step towards the creation of a single market in financial services. It will give credit institutions (broadly, banks and building societies) the right to establish a branch in, or provide cross-border services into, another member state on the basis of their home state authorisation. This right will extend to a wide range of banking services including those mentioned. The directive is currently under detailed consideration in a Council working group of representatives from the member states and the Commission. The Commission has recently made revised proposals for a reciprocity provision in the directive. The Council of Ministers had an initial discussion of these new proposals on 17 April, and they are being considered further.

Finance Bill

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the notes on those clauses of the Finance Bill to be taken in Committee of the whole House will be made available to hon. Members.

Mr. Major: Yes. The appropriate notes on clauses were placed in the Vote Office earlier today.

Computers

Miss. Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many instances have been detected in the

Inland Revenue computer system of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* viruses, *(c)* logic bombs, *(d)* Trojan horses or *(e)* other types of computer misuse, whether perpetuated by authorised or unauthorised users of computers; and how many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* It is not the policy of this Department to make public details and circumstances of computer security incidents, their perpetrators and their success or failure, since such information would be of assistance to potential attackers.

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total income tax payment for *(a)* a single person on £40,000, *(b)* a married man with no children on £40,000 and *(c)* a married man with two children on £40,000 with no other allowances apart from the basic allowances; and what would be the total payments in each category if the standard rate of income tax for those earning £40,000 were raised to 50 per cent.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* The information is as follows:

Income tax liability[1] 1989-90 on income of £40,000

Category	*Assuming 1989 Budget proposals £ p.a.*	*Assuming single rate of tax of 50 per cent. £ p.a.*
(a) Single person	11,781·00	18,607·50
(b) Married man with no children	11,145·00	17,812·50
(c) Married man with two children[2]	10,391·00	17,058·50

[1] Assumes no other allowances apart from the basic personal allowances.
[2] Deducting child benefit of £7·25 per week per child.

Double Taxation (Ireland)

Mr. Hume: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement indicating whether there have been any reviews of, or amendments to, the Treasury or Inland Revenue's interpretation of functions of a governmental nature covered by article 18(1) of the double taxation agreement with the Republic of Ireland; and if he will detail the date, content and status of any guidelines issued to Inland Revenue officials on such interpretation on and since the introduction of the double Taxation Agreement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* There have been no reviews. The article concerned is common in form to many of our double taxation agreements and guidelines on it have been available for many years to officials. Any matters of particular difficulty are handled centrally.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement listing the functions of a governmental nature covered by article 18(1) of the double taxation agreement between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 18 April 1989]:* Where services are rendered directly to the Government or a local authority they are considered to involve the discharge of functions of a governmental nature. Where, however, services are rendered by employees to an agency, board or other statutory body, they are considered to render services to that agency, board or statutory body and not to the Government or a local authority.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

West Bank and Gaza Strip

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, *Official Report*, 20 April, columns 241-42, as to the aid over the last five years to the West Bank and Gaza Strip from *(a)* other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, *(b)* other European Economic Community countries and *(c)* other sources.

Mr. Chris Patten: Information on other donors' aid to the West Bank and Gaza is scarce. Our understanding is that France, Germany, Italy and Spain have programmes broadly comparable with that of the United Kingdom; that the United States of America provides substantially more; and that some other western donors maintain small programmes.

Outside the OECD and the European Community the eastern bloc and Arab donors provide some assistance, the former mainly through training awards. Among Arab donors Jordan was particularly active in the occupied territories until last year.

Among multilateral donors the European Community provided the equivalent of £5 million from 1981 to 1986 and some £2 million in each of 1987 and 1988. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees provided US$174·5 million in 1986, US$208·8 million in 1987 and US$216·4 million in 1988; these figures also include expenditure in Lebanon and refugee camps elsewhere in the region.

WALES

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department does not have any Siemens ND3 printers. Contracts which my Department has with private companies do not specify that particular printers should or should not be used.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made, in conjunction with the Welsh Language Board, in discussing the changes to legislation with regard to the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has already taken action via the Local Government and Housing Bill to allow local authorities in Wales to adopt the Welsh

version of their official title. The Welsh Language Board has made good progress in considering a number of other areas where difficulties have arisen with regard to the use of Welsh in the past and my right hon. Friend will consider its proposals as they emerge.

ESA Payments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether ESA payments to farmers in Wales are made to those who are farming the relevant land whether as tenants or owner occupiers or to the landowners.

Mr. Peter Walker: ESA payments are made to the applicant who will usually be an owner-occupier or tenant of the land. Joint applications can be accepted from landlord and tenant.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has issued any guidelines on the effect on agricultural rents of ESA payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. Agricultural rents are a matter for negotiation between landlord and tenant.

Health Service

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each health authority the percentage of consultant hours in each specialty which are contracted to *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* private practice.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by health authority the average number of National Health Service operations done by consultants in each specialty in each of the past three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Grist: Information is not available in the form requested.

The information shown in the following tables relates to the number of operative procedures performed in NHS hospitals, by specialty.

Specialty	*Clwyd*	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Pembroke-shire*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*
Number of operations by specialty—1985[1]									
General medicine	913	870	1,557	251	1,391	379	[2]	1,182	2,794
Paediatrics	140	[2]	231	176	522	[2]	[2]	788	213
Chest diseases	242	267	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	380	[2]
Dermatology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	96	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Neurology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	75	357
Cardiology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	966	[2]
Rheumatology	78	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	22	[2]	[2]	56
Geriatrics	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	98	74	[2]	[2]	64
General surgery	10,071	5,039	7,315	5,652	7,608	2,177	51	7,276	5,298
ENT	2,863	1,478	2,508	899	2,932	[2]	[2]	3,193	1,841
Trauma and orthopaedic	4,190	1,593	2,815	1,749	3,979	968	[2]	4,100	2,906
Ophthalmology	1,520	812	852	1,024	1,443	[2]	[2]	932	692
Radiotherapy	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	2,637	907
Urology	[2]	[2]	1,470	[2]	1,609	[2]	[2]	2,041	1,296
Plastic surgery	[2]	[2]	3,402	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Thoracic surgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	272	[2]
Dental surgery	891	208	933	367	959	[2]	[2]	1,797	1,035
Neurosurgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	305	689
Gynaecology	4,378	1,895	5,230	2,551	5,653	1,212	[2]	4,960	5,793
Obstetrics	4,338	1,895	5,155	2,200	5,737	1,363	[2]	5,709	5,161
Special care babies	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	75	[2]
Cardiac surgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	393	[2]
Burns	[2]	[2]	178	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Neurology radiologist	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	193	[2]
GP Maternity	[2]	[2]	798	75	120	52	516	[2]	[2]
GP Medical	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	861	[2]	[2]
GP Dental	140	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Other specialist units	125	[2]	179	[2]	751	[2]	[2]	111	[2]
Orthodontics	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	94	[2]	[2]	[2]
Intermittent haemodialysis	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	89
Acute geriatrics	266	[2]	59	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	157	280
Haematology	166	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	412	372
Short stay units	341	[2]	73	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Other/not known	108	124	160	52	38	37	92	146	134
Number of operations by specialty—1986[1]									
General medicine	1,417	1,025	1,749	363	2,172	402	[2]	1,288	3,008
Paediatrics	178	[2]	311	191	646	[2]	[2]	1,152	285
Chest diseases	207	421	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	384	[2]
Dermatology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	133	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Neurology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	52	435
Cardiology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	788	[2]
Rheumatology	55	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	95
Geriatrics	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	103	[2]	[2]	330
General surgery	10,029	6,550	8,122	5,646	9,849	2,857	[2]	7,171	4,719
ENT	2,753	2,023	2,436	951	3,016	120	[2]	3,573	1,575
Trauma and orthopaedic	3,558	2,074	2,946	1,908	4,428	1,492	[2]	4,069	2,890
Ophthalmology	1,576	935	1,233	1,063	2,020	[2]	[2]	1,091	835

Specialty	Clwyd	East Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Pembro ke-shire	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan
Radiotherapy	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	2,927	1,110
Urology	[2]	[2]	1,482	[2]	1,637	[2]	[2]	2,065	1,722
Plastic surgery	[2]	[2]	3,466	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Thoracic surgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	266	[2]
Dental surgery	970	207	823	304	1,086	[2]	[2]	3,027	1,214
Neurosurgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	279	876
Gynaecology	4,576	2,212	5,058	2,673	5,873	1,667	[2]	5,994	5,810
Obstetrics	4,689	1,851	5,071	2,263	6,853	1,356	[2]	5,102	5,356
Special care babies	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	55	[2]
Cardiac surgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	317	[2]
Burns	[2]	[2]	86	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Neurology radiologist	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	411	[2]
GP Maternity	[2]	[2]	632	70	81	53	504	[2]	[2]
GP Medical	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	803	[2]	[2]
GP Dental	89	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Other specialist units	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	796	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Orthodontics	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	248	[2]	[2]	[2]
Intermittent haemodialysis	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	178
Acute geriatrics	299	88	173	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	173	188
Haematology	103	90	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	330	358
Anaesthetics	60	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	208	[2]
Short stay units	509	[2]	262	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Other/not known	143	155	193	43	160	48	97	180	55
Number of operations by specialty—1987[1]									
General medicine	1,432	1,353	1,762	684	2,572	349	[2]	1,277	3,260
Paediatrics	210	[2]	206	209	292	[2]	[2]	1,222	265
Chest diseases	180	618	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	339	[2]
Dermatology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	125	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Neurology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	386
Cardiology	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	903	[2]
Rheumatology	[2]	[2]	91	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	99
Geriatrics	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	99	[2]	[2]	752
General surgery	10,110	6,930	8,379	5,617	11,464	2,883	[2]	6,928	5,266
ENT	2,635	2,310	2,256	995	2,975	114	[2]	3,457	2,014
Trauma and orthopaedic	3,859	2,209	3,257	1,923	4,902	1,409	[2]	4,058	3,421
Opthalmology	1,906	1,045	1,222	1,232	2,912	[2]	[2]	957	957
Radiotherapy	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	2,773	1,537
Urology	378	[2]	1,999	[2]	1,707	[2]	[2]	1,950	1,622
Plastic surgery	[2]	[2]	3,371	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Thoracic surgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	267	[2]
Dental surgery	1,024	245	766	240	1,052	[2]	[2]	3,045	1,285
Neurosurgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	271	1,001
Gynaecology	4,909	2,323	4,688	2,671	8,238	1,675	[2]	6,365	6,180
Obstetrics	4,960	2,011	5,104	2,293	7,194	1,424	[2]	5,623	5,693
Cardiac surgery	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	268	[2]
Burns	[2]	[2]	197	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Neurology radiologist	60	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	280	[2]
GP Maternity	[2]	[2]	555	112	[2]	[2]	494	[2]	[2]
GP Medical	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	811	[2]	[2]
GP Dental	85	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Other specialist units	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	260	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Orthodontics	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	253	[2]	[2]	[2]
Intermittent haemodialysis	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	78
Acute geriatrics	325	172	132	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	256	[2]
Haematology	130	131	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	125	365
Anaesthetics	115	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	217	[2]
Short stay units	572	[2]	278	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Other/not known	143	157	218	48	217	98	31	173	227

[1] A number of non-operative procedures may also be included.
[2] denotes that fewer than 50 operative procedures were performed; where applicable such figures are included in the specialty 'other/not known'.

Teachers

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish statistics for every local education authority in Wales showing the number of supply teachers registered for casual cover and showing what incremental point on the main professional grade for teachers' salaries a well-qualified and experienced supply teacher may progress to.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information about the numbers of supply teachers registered with local education authorities is not held centrally. However, the numbers of teachers employed in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools for periods of less than one month on an occasional or short notice basis as at January 1988 are shown in the following table:

	Number
Clwyd	173
Dyfed	90
Gwent	225
Gwynedd	74
Mid Glamorgan	139

	Number
Powys	68
South Glamorgan	191
West Glamorgan	54

These figures exclude supply teachers with contracted employment of one month or longer.

LES's have discretion to pay supply teachers up to the maximum of the main scale and may also award them incentive allowances, subject to the requirements contained in the school teachers pay and conditions document 1988.

Local Education Authorities (Finance)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the capital allocation to each local education authority and *(b)* the capital allocation to each local education authority as a percentage of the bid of that local education authority, in each of the last six years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The capital allocations (for all services) for the years 1984-85 to 1989-90 are shown in the following tables. Since 1985-86 capital allocations to Welsh local education authorities (counties) have not been hypothecated to individual services and have been based on formulae agreed with the local authority associations.

Details of bids and capital allocations for education, together with allocations for 1984-85 as a percentage of bids that year are shown in the following tables.

	Education capital expenditure bids	*1984-85 Education capital allocation*	*Education allocation as a percentage of bids*
Clwyd	8,122	3,797	46·75
Dyfed	6,477	3,054	47·15
Gwent	9,571	4,344	45·39
Gwynedd	2,087	1,628	78·01
Mid Glamorgan	8,892	5,513	62·00
Powys	2,747	1,682	61·23
South Glamorgan	6,683	3,646	54·56
West Glamorgan	9,014	3,398	37·70

Capital allocations

£'000

	1984-85 Total	*1985-86 Total*	*1986-87 Total*	*1987-88 Total*	*1988-89 Total*	*1989-90 provisional*
Clwyd	12,014	12,249	14,092	16,649	16,797	12,840
Dyfed	9,110	11,396	16,615	16,594	15,455	16,948
Gwent	21,437	13,000	17,582	21,466	18,479	24,019
Gwynedd	8,354	11,528	8,565	9,197	7,907	7,903
Mid Glamorgan	19,985	17,102	22,708	24,077	23,126	26,648
Powys	3,730	3,904	6,950	7,111	6,055	6,110
South Glamorgan	14,068	23,008	26,764	32,411	31,357	18,132
West Glamorgan	11,071	14,389	19,233	20,124	18,163	22,247

SCOTLAND

Forestry Projects

68. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of forestry projects currently taking place in Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 the Forestry Commission has, under its grant schemes, approved 4,390 new applications for planting grants in Great Britain.

Electronic Companies

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors have contributed to the recent growth in Scottish-based electronic companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: A range of factors have contributed to the success of electronic companies in Scotland. These include the availability of a highly skilled labour force, backed by a strong higher education system, a diversity of established electronics companies and products which has led to the development of a supply infrastructure, low operational costs, good industrial relations, and the support and encouragement of the Scottish Office, the Scottish Development Agency and Locate in Scotland, the joint inward investment arm of the Scottish Office and the agency.

NHS Reform

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many letters he has received from general practitioners, either direct or via hon. Members *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the Government's proposals in the White Paper on new contracts.

Mr. Rifkind: It is not possible to supply the information in the form requested. About 1,000 letters have been received either from GPs or through hon. Members about the White Paper "Working for Patients" and the new contract for GPs. Many of these letters were written before the new contract proposals were issued in Scotland; and many are based upon a misunderstanding of the proposals in both documents. Some items in both documents are supported; others are queried or opposed.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his estimates of the numbers of potential first-time voters in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee who failed to submit their names and addresses for entry on current electoral registers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The estimated numbers are approximately 2,200 in Glasgow, 1,800 in Edinburgh, 1,000 in Aberdeen and 1,000 in Dundee. These 6,000 represent 29 per cent. of the estimate of 16 and 17-year-olds eligible to be included in the registers for those cities. This is the same percentage as in both 1988 and 1987.

Highland Health Board

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will show for each of the members of the Highland health board their experience, expertise and background.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

Highland health board

Member	*Background*
Appointed to 31 March 1991	
Mr. G. Bruce	Company Manager; Former Chairman Caithness Local Health Council; Chairman Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Mr. M. Cumming	Principal Teacher of Mathematics
Dr. R. S. C. Fergusson	General Medical Practitioner; Former Chairman, Highland Area Medical Committee
Mrs. C. B. Fraser	Retired Registered General Nurse; Director Red Cross (Ross and Cromarty Branch); Involvement with many voluntary organisations
Dr. C. A. S. Galloway	Consultant Paediatrician; Member or Executive Member of various medical organisations
Mr. W. G. Johnston, JP	Accountant/Managing Director of Transport Company; Former Regional and District Councillor
Mrs. V. MacIver	Member Highland Regional Council and Ross and Cromarty District Council; Former Member Ross and Cromarty Local Health Council
Mr. A. K. Robertson	General Dental Practitioner; Member and Former Chairman, Area Dental Committee of Highland Health Board
Mrs. C. Thomson	Former State Registered Nurse; Former Member Ross and Cromarty Local Health Council
Appointed to 31 March 1993	
Mrs. H. E. Betts-Brown	Senior Physiotherapist; Founder member/Former Chairman Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped (Sutherland Branch); Chairman East Sutherland Council of Social Service
Mr. J. Forbes JP	Farmer; Member Highlands and Islands Development Consultative Council; Governor North of Scotland College of Agriculture
Mr. J. G. Ligertwood	Retired Bank Manager; Treasurer of many charitable organisations at various times
Mr. B. A. Merchant	Solicitor; Former member Inverness Local Health Council
Mrs. S. M. C. South	Housewife; Former Chairman Badenoch and Strathspey Local Health Council; Secretary Local Branch Age Concern
Mr. R. R. W. Stewart	Health Board General Manager
Mrs. S. G. H. Stone	Managing Director of Highland Fine Cheeses Ltd.; Founder, Ross-shire Health Protection Trust
Miss I. Urquhart	Registered General Nurse; Member Management Committee of Crossroads (Ross and Cromarty); Member Highland Nursing Advisory Committee

Flood Damage

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether special Government assistance to local authorities will be made available in the light of the floods and storms of February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I indicated to the House on 14 February that I had invited local authorities and others to provide details of the damage which had occurred and of the remedial costs. I made it clear that in considering whether special Government help was needed, particularly to local authorities, the same principles would be applied as in the past. Highland regional council, the worst affected, Inverness district council and 43 housing authorities have responded. I have also received a number of representations from hon. Members, the National Farmers Union of Scotland, Scottish Landowners Federation and from individuals.

Having reviewed the information now available to me, I am pleased to announce that the financial scheme to assist local authorities in emergencies—the Bellwin scheme—will be made available on this occasion on the same basis as it operated in England and Wales in 1987. This will ensure that special financial assistance goes to those local authorities which, as a consequence of the emergency, would otherwise incur an undue financial burden in providing relief and carrying out immediate works to safeguard life or property. Prudent authorities have long provided in their budgets for contingencies and emergencies and the scheme therefore requires authorities to meet the first tranche of expenditure on emergency work up to a threshold. I am setting the threshold at a level equivalent to that used in 1987 which is 0·32 or a penny rate product. Eligible expenditure above that will attract 75 per cent. Government grant. My Department is writing today to all Scottish local authorities explaining how the scheme operates and it will be up to any authority that considers itself eligible to apply to the Department. The scheme does not cover losses that are insurable.

On housing, 33 out of the 43 authorities which replied have estimated some additional housing revenue expenditure but only in one case (Lochaber) above the Bellwin threshold. Local authority capital expenditure is not covered by the Bellwin scheme. However, five authorities also reported a compelling need for increased housing capital expenditure and in the final housing capital allocations for 1989-90 I announced on 29 March I included extra capital allocations totalling £1·7 million for these authorities. Concerning other capital expenditure it would appear that authorities can manage within the capital allocations for 1989-90 which I increased by 16 per cent. over the previous year, but any unmanageable items can, if necessary, be included in their financial plans they will be submitting later this year and which will be carefully considered.

On the flooding of land and agricultural damage, grant-aid is available under the farm and conservation grant scheme. for those farmers who already have plans under the agriculture improvement scheme (EC) or agriculture and horticulture development scheme my officials will consider as sympathetically as possible any applications to vary the plans in order to remedy damage caused by the floods. It is clear that the main problem caused by the flooding and high winds has been the breaching of agricultural floodbanks. Grant for these works is already available at 50 per cent. in the less favoured areas and 40 per cent. elsewhere. Given the seriousness of the problems caused I am satisfied that additional aid is justified and am therefore proposing to increase these grants by 50 per cent., i.e. to 75 per cent. and 60 per cent., for a six months period from today in order to encourage riparian owners and fish farmers to carry out the necessary work. In making available this enhanced assistance, I am particularly conscious of the problems of those in the Conon area. I have consequently called for a more detailed report covering not only the agricultural interest of the area but the public safety aspects associated with the A832 and Conon village. In the light of that report I will review whether any government assistance is necessary.

On forestry, I have received advice from the Forestry Commission from which I have concluded that while a number of individual estates have suffered significant wind blow the scale of damage is not beyond existing harvesting resources and that there is likely to be little overall effect on the timber market. Almost 4 million cu m of timber were lost in the south in 1987 and timber prices were badly affected. The February storms damaged 0·3 million cu m and there has not been the same effect on timber prices. Planting grants are already available. There does not seem, therefore, to be a need for any special measures in this sector.

On private property the same principles that have applied in the past will apply on this occasion, namely that the Government cannot meet damage to private property which is normally insurable, otherwise few would take out insurance.

I have also considered assessments of damage and cost from other public services and utilities for which I am responsible. The physical damage and other repair costs will be found from within my resources.

The measures that I have announced will, I hope, be welcomed as providing both short-term assistance to those local authorities who undertook emergency work as well as assistance with repair in the longer term.

Business Rate

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the organisations and individuals who have responded to the 1989 consultation document on the transitional arrangements for non-domestic rating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment issued a consultation paper on 15 February setting out the Government's proposals for transitional arrangements to introduce gradually in England and Wales the changes resulting from the revaluation and introduction of the uniform business rate in 1990. We have made it clear that although the magnitude of the changes will be less in Scotland in 1990, Scottish business ratepayers will benefit from the same level of protection against any significant increases in rates bills. The detailed arrangements for implementing this phasing will be the subject of consultations later this year.

Community Charge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest cost estimate for the collection of community charge as a proportion of the costs of collection of the rates.

Mr. Lang: Based on the latest estimates provided by regional and islands councils, the cost of collection of the community charge as a proportion of the cost of rates collection is 1.9:1.

Clyde Port Authority

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland upon what statutory basis the Clyde port authority is founded; what is the productive acreage held by it; and what acreage of property it has available for development.

Mr. Portillo: The Clyde port authority is a trust established by the Clyde Port Authority Order Confirmation act 1965. Questions about the authority's land holdings are for it to answer; the Department does not have this information.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Accounts

Q38. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will introduce legislation to require private secretaries to Cabinet Ministers, and chief departmental press officers who have lodged their accounts of departmental business for safe keeping in bank vaults to transfer such accounts after a three-year period to departmental records.

The Prime Minister: No.

STUC

Q62. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Environment

Q100. **Sir Hugh Rossi:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the quality of the environment.

Q186. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the quality of the environment.

Q208. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the quality of the environment.

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations, many of which echo this Government's concern to maintain and improve environmental standards.

Training Schemes

Q119. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the operating of training schemes for those seeking employment.

Q128. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the quality of training schemes for those seeking employment.

Q144. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the operating of training schemes for those seeking employment.

The Prime Minister: I receive many comments about YTS and employment training, both of which are successful in training people for jobs.

Bournemouth

Q129. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make an official visit to Bournemouth.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

Q151. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will now visit the Settle to Carlisle railway.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

MV Perintis

Q160. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if, following the foundering of the MV Perintis, in the channel on or about 13 March, with its cargo of the pesticides Permethrin, Cypermethrin and the organochlorine Lindane, Her Majesty's Government have any proposals to put to the international community concerning the implementation of a hazardous and noxious substances convention; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom is one of four states developing alternative approaches for a future hazardous and noxious substances convention. These alternatives will be considered by the Internation Maritime Organisation's legal committee at its meeting in 1990. The Department of Transport is to host a meeting to discuss the common elements of tne four alternatives in May.

European Community

Mr. Soames: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the objectives of Her Majesty's Government's policy on the European Community.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom is an active and committed member of the European Community. We want a prosperous, competitive and united Europe, open to enterprise and so creating more wealth, more jobs and more consumer choice. That is why we strongly support the 1992 programme, and believe it will benefit Britain, the Community, and the world trading system.

East Anglia

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Prime Minister in the light of the all-day seminar on climatic change and global warning, what interdepartmental plans will be prepared to safeguard the coast of East Anglia.

The Prime Minister: Most coastal flood defence work in East Anglia is carried out by Anglian water authority. This authority is already taking account of the possibility of rises in sea level in the design of future flood and sea defence works, and has plans for a major programme of renewal and improvement work along the east coast. Increased Government funding for flood and coastal defences was announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, and a major part of this extra funding has been earmarked to assist the authority in carrying forward this vital work.

Engagements

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

Mr. French: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 27 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will publish in the *Official Report* his best estimate showing the value of output of finished manufactures in the United Kingdom for home consumption and export for the years *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1988, together with the percentage estimates of (i) imported service manufactures and intermediate finished manufactures and (ii) imported basic materials.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not possible to estimate a split between production for export and for the home market with any confidence because of lack of data on the very substantial entrepot trade. The closest available figures are as follows:

Gross output of finished manufactures

	1985 prices
	£ billion
1970	129·5
1979	144·5
1988	156·6

Imports of:

	Semi-manufactures (SITC 5+6)	Intermediate finished manufactures (part of SITC 7+8) £ billion 1985 prices	Basic materials (SITC 2+4) OTS basis
1970	9·9	2·8	6·1
1979	17·8	7·0	6·0
1988	28·0	18·3	6·5

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year since 1970 *(a)* the proportion of United Kingdom exports of finished manufactures sent to the United States of America and, *(b)* the ratio of United Kingdom to United States of America export unit values for manufactures, based on 1970 equals 100.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is in the table. The relationship between the export unit values has been derived both in common currency, the US dollar, and in national currency terms.

	Proportion of United Kingdom exports finished[1] manufactures going to United States of America Per cent.	Ratio of United Kingdom to United States of America export unit values of manufactures[2] National currencies[3] Per cent.	United States dollars[4] Per cent.
1970	11·3	100	100
1971	11·4	103	105
1972	12·7	106	111
1973	12·8	109	112
1974	11·6	113	110
1975	9·9	121	111
1976	10·5	135	102
1977	9·4	152	111
1978	10·7	157	126
1979	10·7	148	131
1980	10·9	150	145
1981	11·4	143	120
1982	11·3	144	105
1983	12·8	155	98
1984	16·1	165	92
1985	18·2	172	93
1986	17·7	173	106
1987	17·4	176	120
1988	15·2	[5]176	[5]130

[1] Standard International Trade Classification (STIC), Rev 2 Sections 7 and 8
[2] SITC, Rev 2, Sections 5 to 8
[3] United Kingdom index in sterling compared with United States of America index in United States dollars
[4] United Kingdom and United States of America indices both in United States dollars
[5] First three quarters only
Sources: United Nations, Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will publish in the *Official Report* his best estimate of the number of cars assembled in the United Kingdom from imported components in 1970, 1979 and 1988 which would not qualify for free movement within the European Economic Community if the imported components were not of European Economic Community origin.

Mr. Alan Clark: None. Under European Community rules, cars are regarded as having EC origin notwithstanding the origin of imported components provided that the last substantial manufacturing process is undertaken within the Community. All cars assembled in the United Kingdom since our accession to the Community in 1973 have qualified for free circulation on that basis.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will publish in the *Official Report* his best estimate of the value and proportion of United Kingdom exports of manufactures which have been *(a)* assembled in the United Kingdom from imported components and *(b)* imported for re-export in the same state, in the years 1970, 1979 and 1988.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on which to base the required estimates is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will publish in the *Offical Report* a table showing production, imports and exports of intermediate finished manufacturers, as defined in the monthly review of external trade statistics for the years 1970, 1979 and 1988 in terms of current prices, 1988 prices and as a percentage of United Kingdom production of finished manufactures in each year.

Mr. Alan Clark: Figures for production of intermediate finished manufactures comparable with the trade statistics

as defined in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" are not available. The remainder of the figures requested are as follows:

	Imports of intermediate finished manufacturers (£ billion)		*Imports*[1]
	Current prices	*1988 prices*	
1970	0·7	2·8	2·2
1979	4·9	6·9	4·8
1988	17·9	17·9	11·7

[1] Intermediate finished manufactures as per cent. of production of finished manufactures.

	Exports of intermediate finished manufactures (£ billion)		*Exports*[1]
	Current prices	*1988 prices*	
1970	1·5	8·5	5·9
1979	7·3	13·0	8·0
1988	16·0	16·0	9·1

[1] Intermediate finished manufactures as per cent. of production of finished manufactures.

Israel

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list in the *Official Report* a breakdown by type of the trade between the United Kingdom and *(a)* Israel and *(b)* the West Bank and Gaza Strip in each of the last five years.

Mr. Alan Clark: United Kingdom trade with Israel, broken down by standard international trade classification divisions, is published in the annual volumes of the *Overseas Trade Statistics* for 1984 to 1987 and the December volume for 1988 (tables II—imports, V—exports). Copies of these are available in the Library. United Kingdom trade with the West Bank and Gaza Strip is not separately identified.

Inter-Industry Agreements

Mr. Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the inter-industry agreements on machining centres and numerically controlled lathes from Japan, referred to in his answer of 30 March 1988, *Official Report*, column *478*, are still in operation.

Mr. Alan Clark: Following a second annual review of the inter-industry voluntary restraint arrangements with Japan on numerically controlled lathes and machining centres, I have told the Machine Tool Trades Association that the Government see no case for these arrangements to continue after 30 June 1989.

Gas

Mr. Maples: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the Government will implement the recommendation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on gas (Cm. 500) that British Gas should be required not to contract initially for more than 90 per cent. of deliveries from any new field within the United Kingdom continental shelf.

Mr. Maude: The Government accept the objective of the MMC recommendation, but believe that it can best be achieved in a modified way. They have therefore set as a target that 10 per cent. of the gas coming forward from new gas fields should be supplied to the market by suppliers other than British Gas. This target, which covers gas both on the United Kingdom continental shelf and imported, includes gas carried both by British Gas on a common carrier basis, and by any new dedicated pipelines that may be built by carriers other than British Gas. For the purposes of this target, all gas supplies contracted from producers after 31 May 1989 will be taken into account. However, a small number of large deals involving limited classes of customer will not of itself secure the early development of competition for the benefit of industrial and commercial contract customers for gas which is required. During the first two years in which the target operates the Government will monitor the position closely and will pay particular attention to the level of sales contracted into the general industrial and commercial gas market. The Department of Energy will publish the outcome against target for the years ending 31 May 1990 and 31 May 1991 and, within that, the level of sale to industrial and commercial contract customers achieved.

I was attracted by the possibility of placing a ceiling of one or 2 per cent. on each contribution towards the target from a single customer's usage at a single site but decided against such a specific ceiling lest it distort the development of the market. However, when the arrangements are reviewed in July 1991, attention will be focused particularly on the size and diversity of gas users no longer solely dependent on British Gas. If progress towards the establishment of a competitive market is not satisfactory by that time, I may resort to order-making powers under the Fair Trading Act which flow from the adverse findings in the report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

I am inviting the Director General of Fair Trading to seek an undertaking from British Gas under section 88 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 actively to facilitate the efforts of gas producers towards achievement of this target both in its contracting arrangements and, in particular, by agreeing as appropriate to carry the relevant quantities of gas as a common carrier.

In addition the Government will continue to explore all means of developing competition in supplying gas to business users.

Barlow Clowes

30. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made towards obtaining reimbursement for those affected by the British based and Gibraltar based elements of the Barlow Clowes organisation; what initiatives have been taken by his Department in the last six months; what initiatives he will now take to seek a speedier resolution of outstanding problems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton *[pursuant to his reply, 15 March 1989, c. 259]:* The 19 FIMBRA members referred to as subject to disciplinary action include both the Investment and Pensions Advisory Service and the Investment and Pensions Advisory Service Ltd. These two firms had close connections but were separate entities. However, in referring to the number of firms which had been suspended they were inadvertently treated as one. The correct comparison therefore is that of the 19 members subject to disciplinary action, four, not three, have been suspended.

Blue Arrow

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he intends to appoint inspectors under section 432 of the Companies Act to investigate Blue Arrow and the Peter de Savary deal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude *[pursuant to his reply, 20 April 1989, c. 257]:* On 26 April Blue Arrow announced that it intended by the middle of May to send to its shareholders a circular dealing with this transaction. The loan facility and its circumstances are principally a matter for Blue Arrow shareholders, but my Department is being kept fully informed and I trust that the company will meet the deadline it has set itself for briefing them. The International stock exchange is concerned with disclosure requirements and it has confirmed to me that it will require a circular which gives full details and a full explanation of the loan facility.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

"The School Difference"

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make available in the library a copy of the report commissioned by his Department from the Policy Studies Institute entitled, "The School Difference"; and if he will make a statement on its findings.

Mr. Butcher: The Policy Studies Institute is expected to publish its report on multi-racial secondary schools, entitled "The School Effect", in July. I shall then place a copy in the library.

The major findings of this report are that there were striking differences between the schools surveyed in what they did and how they did it; and that the level of achievement of pupils of similar abilities, regardless of their ethnic or social background, varied markedly according to the school they attended.

The findings will be of interest to all who share the Government's concern to improve standards and ensure that pupils of all ethnic groups have equal opportunity to benefit from what schools can offer.

Teachers

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Crosby of 13 April, *Official Report,* columns *630-32,* he will publish a further table showing an analysis by age and sex of all such leavers below normal retirement age for each of the years ended March 1984, 1985 and 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Figures of full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England leaving full-time service in the maintained sector at ages under 60 are as follows:

	Year ending March		
	1984	*1985*	*1986*
All leavers aged under 60	13,350	14,620	15,150
Men leavers aged under 60	4,590	5,270	5,810
of which, number aged:			
less than 30	870	850	960
30-34	860	930	1,000
35-39	670	810	900
40-44	350	470	570
45-49	320	370	370
50-54	520	620	710
55-59	1,010	1,210	1,300
Women leavers aged under 60	8,760	9,350	9,340
of which, number aged:			
less than 30	2,510	2,470	2,140
30-34	2,490	2,500	2,330
35-39	1,150	1,340	1,470
40-44	640	750	920
45-49	470	530	610
50-54	600	720	810
55-59	910	1,050	1,050

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England left full-time service in the maintained sector at the normal retirement age in each of the years ended March 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Butcher: The numbers of full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England leaving full-time service in the maintained sector at age 60 or over in the years ending March 1984, 1985 and 1986 were 2,310, 2,250 and 2,090 respectively.

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment his Department has made of the extent to which the statistical evidence on secondary teacher resignations, given at table 21 of Cm. 625, "Second Report of the Interim Advisory Committee" is reliable; what comparable statistical evidence is available from his Department's database of teacher records; if he will make a statement on the extent of the apparent trends in numbers of secondary resignations shown by the evidence of table 21 for 1987 and the evidence from his Department for 1984, 1985 and 1986 given in reply to the hon. Member for Crosby, *Official Report,* 13 April, columns *630-32;* when he expects to have a report on secondary resignations for 1987 from the database of teacher records; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Table 21 of Cm. 625 is based on a survey carried out by the Local Authorities' Conditions of Service Advisory Board (LACSAB). It shows the number of secondary teacher resignations in the calendar year 1987 analysed by teaching subject and destination. The Department's database of teacher records (DTR) cannot readily yield data for this period, not does it contain information on either of these aspects. It is not possible therefore to derive from the DTR analyses that are comparable to (and so could test the reliability of) those in table 21, Cm. 625.

No inferences can be drawn from the difference between the DTR estimates for 1984 to 1986 in *Official Report,* 13 April, columns *630-32* and the LACSAB data for 1987 in table 21, Cm. 625. The DTR estimates relate to teachers leaving the maintained sector, the LACSAB data to those resigning from schools (many of whom may merely be moving to other schools within the maintained sector).

Estimates from the DTR for the year ending March 1987 are expected to be available shortly.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the implications for his policy on university finances of the Association of University Teachers pay dispute.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 23 March, at column *684*. That is still the position.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish statistics for every local education authority in England showing the number of supply teachers registered for casual cover and showing what incremental point on the main professional grade for teachers salaries a well-qualified and experienced supply teacher may progress to.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information about the numbers of supply teachers registered with local education authorities is not held centrally. However, the numbers of teachers employed in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools for periods of less than one month on an occasional or short notice basis on 21 January 1988 are shown in the table. These figures exclude supply teachers with contracts of employment of one month or longer.

Local education authorities have discretion to pay supply teachers, subject to the requirements of the school teachers pay and conditions document 1988, up to the maximum of the main scale, and may also award them incentive allowances.

Teachers in occasional service in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools (January 1988)

LEA	*Number*
Barking	25
Barnet	70
Bexley	70
Brent	153
Bromley	53
Croydon	68
Ealing	88
Enfield	58
Haringey	63
Harrow	59
Havering	61
Hillingdon	49
Hounslow	69
Kinston	40
Merton	63
Newham	41
Redbridge	43
Richmond	44
Sutton	55
Waltham Forest	53
ILEA	1,043
Birmingham	281
Coventry	80
Dudley	100
Sandwell	55
Solihull	34
Walsall	49
Wolverhampton	42
Knowsley	13
Liverpool	59
St. Helens	67
Sefton	79
Wirral	151
Bolton	114
Bury	43
Manchester	106
Oldham	111
Rochdale	83
Salford	109
Stockport	115
Tameside	60
Trafford	77
Wigan	187
Barnsley	69
Doncaster	80
Rotherham	70
Sheffield	8
Bradford	217
Calderdale	63
Kirklees	98
Leeds	100
Wakefield	73
Gateshead	69
Newcastle	97
North Tyneside	55
South Tyneside	19
Sunderland	54
Avon	283
Bedfordshire	145
Berkshire	169
Buckinghamshire	108
Cambridgeshire	63
Cheshire	330
Cleveland	164
Cornwall	130
Cumbria	158
Derbyshire	288
Devon	278
Dorset	35
Durham	61
East Sussex	125
Essex	398
Gloucestershire	58
Hampshire	296
Hereford and Worcester	139
Hertfordshire	392
Humberside	201
Isle of Wight	19
Kent	324
Lancashire	523
Leicestershire	197
Lincolnshire	178
Norfolk	130
North Yorkshire	178
Northamptonshire	129
Northumberland	59
Nottinghamshire	0
Oxfordshire	92
Salop	149
Somerset	32
Staffordshire	167
Suffolk	45
Surrey	222
Warwickshire	117
West Sussex	110
Wiltshire	127
England	11,974

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the second report of the interim advisory committee on school teachers pay and conditions will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Baker *[pursuant to his reply, 16 February 1989, c. 323-26.]:* After careful consideration of the representations I have received I have decided to accept the recommendations on pay rates and conditions of employment contained in the second report of the interim advisory committee on school teachers pay and conditions of employment contained in the second report of the interim advisory committee on school teachers pay and conditions. Drafts of the school teachers pay and conditions document 1989, an order which will give effect to this document, and a circular to local education authorities are being sent today to the relevant local

authority associations, teacher unions and bodies representing the interests of the governors of voluntary schools inviting their comments by Thursday 18 May 1989.

Schools

Mr. Buckley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools he has visited since his appointment; and how many of these are *(a)* state funded and *(b)* independent schools.

Mr. Butcher: Approximately 126, of which about 14 were independent.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the schools in England and Wales that have experienced major damage by fire in each of the last 24 months.

Mr. Butcher: This information is not collected by the Department of Education and Science or the Welsh Office education department. The Fire Protection Association maintains a record of the majoriy of major fires in Great Britain, and I have asked for details. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much from each local authority's capital allocation has been spent on the improvement or replacement of existing school buildings in each of the last five years.

Mr. Butcher: The information requested was not collected centrally before 1988-89. In 1988-89 expenditure on new improvement and replacement projects for all local education authorities was £119 million. In addition, authorities will have spent substantial sums on improvement projects which they had already started in previous years.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about fire safety arrangements within schools.

Mr. Butcher: Under the terms of regulation 24 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981, local education authorities have a duty to provide fire precautions and means of escape in the case of fire in maintained schools.

In the case of independent schools, registration under part III of the 1944 Education Act rests, amongst other things, on the provision and maintenance of adequate fire precautions.

Pupil Costs

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average cost of *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special needs pupils for 1987-88 (i) in England and (ii) in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Butcher: The available information is given in the table.

Net Institutional Expenditure[1] per pupil[2] 1987-88

	Nursery and Primary (£)	*Secondary* (£)	*Special* (£)
Nottinghamshire	1,020	1,545	4,145
England	1,010	1,520	4,925

[1] Net Institutional Expenditure includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

[2] The figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DoE and pupil number returns to DES.

Secondary School Placements (Appeals)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many appeals against placement in secondary schools are expected for September; and what was the figure a year earlier.

Mr. Butcher: The results of an informal survey of local education authorities suggest there were some 6,850 appeals in respect of secondary school admissions in the calendar year 1987. No figures are available for 1988. The Department has not made any specific forecast of the likely number of such appeals in 1989 but we hope that more parents will be satisfied this year, as a result of preparations for the implementation of more open enrolment in secondary schools in September 1990.

Student Loans

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the adverse impact, and deterrent effect, of the proposed loans for students, upon the number of women entering higher education; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations concerning the potential effects of top-up loans on women. The Government's proposals mean that loan repayments can be deferred when the borrower's income is low.

Experience of student loan schemes abroad gives us no reason to expect that women will be deterred from entering higher education because of the operation of the loans scheme.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the average class sizes in primary and secondary education in state and private schools, respectively, in the years 1979, 1984 and 1988.

Mr. Butcher: Information on average class sizes in private schools is not collected centrally. The average class size in maintained primary and secondary schools in England in January of each year 1979, 1984 and 1988 is as follows:

Class sizes relate to those taught by one teacher during a selected period on the day of the census count in January and do not necessarily represent the pattern of classes over the academic year as a whole.

Average size of class

	January of each year		
	1979	*1984*	*1988*
Primary	25·9	24·7	25·4
Secondary	21·0	20·4	19·9

Languages

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the best estimate available of the

proportion of 14 and 15-year-olds in Britain, and in each of the other European Community countries, who are studying, as part of their school curriculum *(a)* French, *(b)* German, *(c)* Italian, *(d)* Spanish, *(e)* English and *(f)* other modern languages to a recognised standard;

(2) if he will list the number of pupils and the proportion of total pupils so represented in the fourth and fifth years of secondary school in *(a)* the maintained sector and *(b)* the private sector who are studying: (i) French, (ii) German, (iii) Italian, (iv) Spanish, (v) other modern European languages and (vi) other modern non-European languages.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The following information is readily available.

Percentage of secondary school pupils in certain EC countries studying foreign languages

	EC countries			[4] England				
					Maintained Schools		Independent schools	
	[1] France Per cent.	[2] Germany Per cent.	[3] Ireland Per cent.	Per cent. of school leavers	Numbers (000s)	Per cent. of all school leavers	Numbers (000s)	Per cent. of all school leavers
English	82	91	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
French	[5]—	21	71	41	260	39	35	78
German	22	[5]—	6	11	69	10	8	18
Italian	2	—	—	—	1	—	1	1
Spanish	16	—	3	2	14	2	3	6
Other modern languages	1	1	—	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

[1] Age 11-14 in 1982-83.
[2] Age 10-15 in 1982-83.
[3] Age 12-14 in 1982-83.
[4] School leavers attempting GCE O-level and CSE in 1986-87.
[5] — Not applicable.
n.a.—Not available.
Source:
'Education and Training' 1985 Eurostat.

Secondary School Staffing Survey

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the conclusions of the secondary school staffing survey; and if he will now publish the survey.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Key results from the 1988 secondary school staffing survey will be available within the next few days, and I will ensure that the hon. Member receives a copy. Copies will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and sent to the Education Science and Arts Committee. More extensive analyses are expected to be available within the next month or so.

EMPLOYMENT

Policy Targets

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the policy areas in which his Department has failed to achieve its targets since 1979.

Mr. Cope: I am satisfied that my Department's programmes and policies have generally met their objectives, but we keep them under review and are always looking for ways to improve their effectiveness.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Cope: My departmental staff records show a total of 1,256 staff in support grades in the Department of Employment group. The number of current vacancies is fewer than 20, of which about half have existed for more than three months. There are approximately 75 casual/temporary appointments. More precise figures and the amount of overtime worked can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Private Zoos

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what accident statistics are collected in relation to private zoos; and what is the record of injury shown by the statistics.

Mr. Nicholls: The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 require that accidents which arise out of or in connection with work activities covered by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 are reported to the relevant enforcing authority. The statistics collected include fatalities, injuries resulting from accidents and, for employees only, instances of disease and dangerous occurrences.

Figures for accidents in private zoos are included with those for certain other recreational and cultural activities, and are not separately identifiable.

Job Clubs (Birmingham)

Mr. Hattersley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what funds have been allocated to the Birmingham area of the employment service to finance job clubs during the year 1989-90.

Mr. Lee: Birmingham area office of the employment service has been allocated £547,000 to finance external job clubs in the year 1989-90. Funds to cover job clubs run directly by the employment service are not separately indentified, but form part of a wider allocation which covers all ES services in the area.

Special Equipment

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will list those items of special equipment which can be made available on free loan to enable persons on the disabled register to do a particular job.

Mr. Lee: Help available is not confined to items on a prescribed list. The special aids to employment scheme can provide a registered disabled person with whichever equipment is required to overcome the effects of his disability in his workplace in the most cost-effective way.

Member's Correspondence (Gower)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Gower of 12 April, *Official Report*, column *588*, he will write to the hon. Member as soon as the decision is taken.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* My Department has not yet received a reply from the European Commission in the case referred to, but as soon as we do, I will write to the hon. Member.

Employees (Public Duties)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many complaints have been made to a tribunal each year for the last five years concerning failure by companies to allow employees time off to undertake public duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* No such cases were dealt with in the period 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989. Figures for previous years are not available.

ENERGY

Petrol

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what petrol reserves were held in the United Kingdom at the latest date for which he has figures; how many days' supply this covers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: At the end of February 1989 it was estimated that the United Kingdom had stocks equivalent to 4·7 million tonnes of petrol or some 74 days cover. This was made up of 2·05 million tonnes of motor spirit in stock and a further 2·65 million tonnes held as crude oil and unprocessed feedstocks available for refining.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects the information on the number and percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively, and overall, in his Department who are from ethnic minorities, to be available.

Mr. Parkinson: By the end of 1989.

AEA Constabulary

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if there has been any occurrences since the formation of the Atomic Energy Authority constabulary when officers of the force have *(a)* been forced to follow in hot pursuit alleged thieves of nuclear materials and *(b)* recovered stolen nuclear materials from civil nuclear plants.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority constabulary is required by the Atomic Energy Authority (Special Constables) Act 1976, section 3, to protect nuclear matter. There have been no occasions since the formation of the constabulary when they have been forced to follow in hot pursuit of alleged thieves of nuclear material, nor have they recovered stolen nuclear materials originating from any civil nuclear plants.

BNF plc

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish the objectives set for British Nuclear Fuels plc in January 1987 and set out the reasons for these objectives being formulated.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department's objectives in respect of British Nuclear Fuels plc are contained in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 of the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General published on 5 April. Copies are available in the Library. Although the objectives were already in existence in January 1987, an internal review suggested that they should be set down formally and reviewed from time to time. The primary objectives of the company are set down in paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7 of the report.

Coal Reserves (Scotland)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the quantity and quality of the coal reserves accessible from Bilston Glen and Monktonhall collieries, including the Musselburgh Bay reserves.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will set out in detail the stages of plutonium processing in the nuclear cycle on which reports are made to the Euratom and IAEA safeguards authorities; and what details are forwarded in each of these reports.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Euratom inspectors have access to all civil material at Sellafield on a continuing basis. The reports the inspectors make are a matter for Euratom and are confidential to it.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has assessed the proof of evidence, CND4, prepared by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament for the Hinkley Point C public inquiry topic III on radioactive materials management; and if he will give consideration to the criticisms made in relation to those policy issues for which his Department has responsibility.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is for the inspector to consider the evidence presented to him at the inquiry.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Farm Capital Grant Scheme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount, in grants, paid out by the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland, under the farm capital grant scheme in each of the years since 1973 to applicants from each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. It has been given on County basis in the schedule.

Schedule
Farm capital grant schemes

Counties	*1973-74 Grant*	*1974-75 Grant*	*1975-76 Grant*	*1976-77 Grant*	*1977-78 Grant*	*1978-79 Grant*	*1979-80 Grant*	*1980-81 Grant*
Antrim	1,614,452	2,333,748	2,333,526	2,247,470	1,927,004	2,162,790	2,353,662	2,905,239
Armagh	887,237	1,395,581	1,251,388	1,106,038	832,460	1,080,418	1,312,827	1,768,321
Down	1,605,048	2,047,864	1,739,037	1,321,347	1,315,823	1,484,386	1,498,499	1,986,656
Fermanagh	699,820	1,005,845	1,032,421	1,002,808	2,060,507	3,200,552	3,602,064	4,791,579
Londonderry	1,360,065	1,802,821	1,654,413	1,526,824	1,440,342	1,970,515	2,275,327	3,031,126
Tyrone	1,879,770	3,082,883	2,567,302	2,626,966	2,588,018	3,302,878	4,123,974	5,186,945
Totals	8,046,392	11,668,742	10,578,087	9,831,453	10,164,154	13,201,539	15,166,353	19,669,866

Counties	*[1] 1981-82 Grant*	*1982-83 Grant*	*1983-84 Grant*	*1984-85 Grant*	*1985-86 Grant*	*1986-87 Grant*	*1987-88 Grant*	*1988-89 Grant*
Antrim	2,407,006	2,338,197	1,920,603	2,600,785	2,508,338	3,055,405	1,132,908	268,192
Armagh	1,673,731	2,277,861	1,914,059	3,036,958	2,873,007	2,452,619	809,527	182,550
Down	1,855,728	1,444,361	1,836,226	2,442,574	1,610,020	1,616,785	523,307	121,468
Fermanagh	5,931,128	3,381,865	2,082,469	1,373,672	1,042,222	977,740	199,303	61,090
Londonderry	2,429,326	1,854,738	2,139,462	2,176,399	1,533,823	1,161,964	340,362	82,302
Tyrone	5,147,881	4,764,866	3,974,303	4,858,359	3,435,800	3,511,115	1,215,041	244,918
Totals	19,444,800	16,061,888	13,840,122	16,488,747	13,003,210	12,775,628	4,220,448	960,520

[1] Figures from 1981-82 onwards incudes grant paid under the agriculture and horticulture grant scheme.

Terrorism

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people were arrested, detained and subsequently released without charge under section 12 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act on more than one occasion during the period 1984 to 1988;

(2) how many people were arrested, detained and subsequently released without charge under section 12 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act on more than two occasions during the period 1984 to 1988.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police Rent Allowance

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* in tabular form details for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available of the total pay bill, compensatory grant received and income tax paid by each police authority in Northern Ireland in respect of police officers' rent allowance.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There is only one police authority for Northern Ireland. The information requested is as follows:

	1988-89 £ million
Rent allowance paid	24·2
Compensatory grant	9·2

A separate record is not maintained of income tax paid on rent allowance.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many *(a)* shotguns, *(b)* ·22 rifles, *(c)* rifles of large calibre, *(d)* handguns, *(e)* sub-machine guns, *(f)* other machine guns and *(g)* explosive devices, owned by or in the possession of (i) the Royal Ulster Constabulary, (ii) the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve, (iii) the Ulster Defence Regiment, (iv) the Army, (v) the Royal Navy and (vi) the Royal Air Force, have been lost or stolen in each year since 1976 to the latest available date; how many such weapons in each category of ownership were subsequently recovered; and how many have been identified in each category and ownership as having been used after theft of loss in criminal or terrorist activity or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* I have made extensive inquiries but it has not proved possible to collate the information in the form requested. I will write to the hon. Member in due course with such information as can be provided.

Traffic Police

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, in view of the 9 per cent. increase in fatal and injury road traffic accidents and the 10 per cent. increase in casualties stated in the annual report of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, he will call for a report on the Chief Constable's decision to reduce the number of officers in the traffic branch by 50; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* The chief constable is responsible for the operational control of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and it is for him to determine priorities and allocate resources.

Cross-border Security

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the significance for the momentum of cross-border security of the announcement of the determination to intensify co-operation over border security in paragraph 2 of the communiqué of the meeting of the Anglo-Irish conference on 5 April.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* The brutal murders of Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Buchanan represented an attack on security co-operation. Far from diminishing the determination of the two sides to work closely together, they have actually reinforced it and, in particular, both police forces will work closely together to the fullest extent to ensure that those guilty of this and other crimes are brought to justice.

TRANSPORT

Shanklin (Oil Slick)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to track down the vessel responsible for the oil slick on Shanklin beach.

Mr. Portillo: We received on 17 April a report of an oil slick which had been observed on 15 April by a vessel at anchor to the south-east of the Isle of Wight. The slick was described as small globules of heavy crude oil amongst other debris and the report included the name of another vessel, which had also been at anchor, in the direction from which the oil had been observed to be coming. It is not yet clear whether there is any connection between that vessel and oil that came ashore at Shanklin on 16/17 April. Samples are now with the laboratory of the Government chemist for analysis.

Channel (Counter-pollution Measures)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how often the anti-pollution aircraft has patrolled the Channel in the last six weeks.

Mr. Portillo: Since 9 March anti-pollution aircraft have carried out 6 patrols over the Channel. Two further planned patrols, on 21 and 22 April, were cancelled when the Department's contracted remote sensing aircraft was deployed to oil spill incidents in the Irish sea and North sea respectively.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department is participating in any review of the handling of major oil spills.

Mr. Portillo: The Department will contribute to the review being carried out by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy, on the handling by the oil industry of major spills from offshore installations.

So far as tanker casualties are concerned, the Government have long accepted the responsibility for dealing with major spills that threaten United Kingdom interests and the Department's marine pollution control unit is a full-time response organisation with specific responsibility for planning contingency arrangements and taking charge of counter-pollution operations. We review these arrangements carefully after every major incident.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As at 1 April 1989 the Department of Transport employed 647 staff in support grades (that is, office keeper, paper-keeper, messenger, security officer, car driver, telephonist and reprographic grades and cleaners). There were 11 posts vacant in these grades, of which three had been vacant for more than one month and six for more than three months. Casual staff are employed to provide cover for vacancies and for staff absent on long-term sick and other leave. Central records are not kept of casual appointments.

Until 31 March 1989 the Departments of the Environment and Transport shared a common services organisation, in which the majority of support staff were based. The latest available overtime figures, which are for March 1989, therefore relate to the two Departments jointly. Overtime working by support grades, excluding cleaners, in March averaged approximately 6.4 hours per head in London headquarters offices and 1¼ hours per head in the major regional offices.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to prevent heavy goods vehicles causing excessive water spray on motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are strongly in favour of action to combat this problem.

New trailers have had to be fitted with spray-reducing devices since May 1985 and new lorries since April 1986. Research is continuing into ways of achieving even greater improvements.

Britain is pressing for the early agreement of the European Commission's draft directive on anti-spray devices. This is necessary if the United Kingdom is to continue to require anti-spray devices after the completion of the single European market.

Drivers could significantly reduce the nuisance of spray to others, by driving more slowly in wet weather.

Advance Payment Compensation

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why advance payment compensation, approved by the district valuer, has not been given to Mr. M. A. E. Thornton of Bishops Tachbrook, Leamington Spa.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The district valuer's report was received in the Department on 19 April. Necessary

documentation was sent to Mr. Thornton's agents on 21 April. As soon as it is returned, advance payment will be made.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will issue guidelines to prospective promoters of a second crossing of the River Severn

Mr. Channon: The tender invitation document is being issued today. Copies of the substantive volumes of the document will be placed in the Library.

This invitation reaffirms the Government's decision to give the private sector the opportunity to participate in the provision of a second Severn crossing. The shortlisted tenderers have been invited to submit proposals on two bases: to design and build the second crossing, and to finance and operate it with the existing crossing; and to design and build the second crossing for the Government. In either case the investment would be recovered through tolls. Under the first option the invitation allows tenderers to propose their own toll regimes within a finite concession period; they will also be required to take on the debt on the existing Severn crossing. Proposals must be submitted by 2 October.

The new crossing will have a dual three-lane carriageway with hardshoulders, and windshielding has been specified.

We are dealing with the approach roads separately, and will make another announcement shortly about these.

Traffic Management (Greater London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made for road maintenance likely to add to traffic congestion in Greater London to be undertaken only at night, giving current or recent examples of any such practice.

Mr. Bottomley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* Each case is considered individually after consultation with the police and the London boroughs. Peak-hour working is avoided wherever practicable.

Consideration is given to night time working at locations where traffic flows are high throughout the day and at weekends.

Recent examples include: carriageway closures on M4 for communication upgrading; resurfacing and annual maintenance work on the A406 north circular road; and lane closures for weekly maintenance in the Blackwall tunnel (southbound).

Night-time working may be precluded because of safety considerations and disturbance to residents. Recent maintenance closures have been publicised in departmental press notices.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the numbers of persons, and their respective Civil Service grades, who are employed in his Department to discharge the traffic management responsibilities hitherto the duty of the Greater London Council; what are the names and duties of each unit; and what standing arrangements now exist or are planned for regular meetings between officials of these units, together, with representatives of the London borough councils and the Metropolitan police, to review incidents of congestion and to plan for effective traffic management consequent on known future events, including road works.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* The Department has assumed the highways and traffic powers of the former Greater London council only in respect of 70 miles of metropolitan roads which are now trunk roads. It is not practicable to identify the numbers and grades of persons employed in the London Regional Office (Transport) on those roads from among their general responsibilities for trunk roads in London.

At the request of the London boroughs, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for the traffic signals and urban traffic control in London. The corporation of the City of London acts as agent. It staffs and maintains the traffic control systems unit as a separate entity within the local government environment. Officials of the Department hold quarterly management liaison meetings with the unit and representatives of the Association of London Authorities, the London Boroughs Association and the Metropolitan and City police. In addition, the unit has regular monthly meetings with the Metropolitan police to review contingency plans for traffic incidents and planned events such as roadworks, bridge closures, and so on, and to plan for effective traffic management in those circumstances.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South on 13 January, *Official Report*, column *800*, concerning causes of major incidents of traffic congestion, he will now monitor such incidents and, in conjunction with London Buses Limited and the respective unit of the Metropolitan police, record the incidence and extent of delay compared to normal free flow conditions and keep a record of any known cause, or contributory cause, leading to each major incident of congestion.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* We are considering how it might be done.

We keep in touch with London Buses Limited and the Metropolitan police on congestion points on trunk roads. The Metropolitan police make such arrangements as they consider necessary to maintain the safe and efficient flow of traffic in the case of day-to-day incidents and to be prepared for planned events.

Underground Railways (Safety)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what exercises using volunteer passengers have taken place on the underground section of the Great Northern line of British Railways between Finsbury Park and Moorgate; what were the results of any such test; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* A major exercise to test evacuation procedures, in which all emergency services participated, was held on 7 February 1988. The need for various improvements was identified. British Rail is presently carrying out a £1 million programme which includes the provision of improved lighting and communications. It expects the work to be finished by September.

Airports

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage greater use of regional airports.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]*: The 1985 airports policy White Paper (Cmnd. 9542) noted that the Government had maintained a consistent policy of encouraging the maximum use of regional airports. They have a role to play in relieving pressure on the London airports. The Government encourage their growth and development.

We provide special borrowing allocations for municipal airports whose expansion is justified.

We continue, both in the EC and in bilateral negotiations, to pursue policies of liberalisation in order to maximise the scope for regional air services.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on future runway capacity in the south east.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]*: The Civil Aviation Authority is due to provide my right hon. Friend in July with advice on this and other aspects of airport and airspace capacity.

M25 Motorway

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the one-way peak-to-daily flow ratio for the M25 *(a)* as predicted for the London orbital motorway at the 1974-75 public inquiry into the A10-A12 section of the motorway by the Department's traffic witness, *(b)* as recorded, for each section for which data is available, when the M25 was fully opened in 1986 and *(c)* as recorded in the latest available year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 24 April 1989]*: The ratios of peak to 24-hour weekday flows for the M25 at November 1986 (first complete month fully open) (expressed as a percentage) are:

Junction number	*Clockwise*	*Anticlockwise*
J1 to J2	—	—
J2 to J3	—	—
J3 to J4	10·7	10·2
J4 to J5	9·2	9·1
J5 to J6	11·1	10·3
J6 to J7	11·4	10·6
J7 to J8	—	—
J8 to J9	9·7	9·0
J9 to J10	9·6	8·3
J10 to J11	9·2	8·5
J11 to J12	9·4	8·3
J12 to J13	—	—
J13 to J14	9·8	9·0
J14 to J15	8·7	8·6
J15 to J16	—	8·9
J16 to J17	8·3	8·6
J19 to J20	8·2	8·6
J22 to J23	—	8·4
J25 to J26	9·8	10·9
J26 to J27	9·6	10·6
J29 to J30	—	8·5
Dartford Tunnel	8·5	8·8

The ratios of peak to 24-hour weekday flows for M25 at March 1989 (latest available month) (expressed as a percentage) are:

Junction number	*Clockwise*	*Anticlockwise*
J1 to J2	—	—
J2 to J3	—	—
J3 to J4	8·0	9·2
J4 to J5	8·2	8·3
J5 to J6	10·9	9·6
J6 to J7	11·5	9·3
J7 to J8	9·9	8·7
J8 to J9	9·6	8·4
J9 to J10	9·6	8·5
J10 to J11	—	[1]—
J11 to J12	—	[1]—
J12 to J13	—	[1]—
J13 to J14	9·6	8·4
J14 to J15	8·5	8·1
J15 to J16	7·7	8·2
J16 to J17	8·2	7·7
J17 to J18	8·0	8·3
J18 to J19	8·0	7·9
J19 to J20	7·8	7·6
J20 to J21	8·1	7·8
J21 to J22	8·1	8·6
J22 to J23	8·1	8·0
J23 to J24	8·2	8·6
J24 to J25	8·4	8·8
J25 to J26	8·5	9·7
J26 to J27	8·3	9·7
J27 to J28	9·2	10·3
J28 to J29	8·4	9·0
J29 to J30	7·4	8·0
Dartford Tunnel	7·5	7·8

[1] No detailed data due to widening works.

Comparable prediction for 1986 and 1989 are not readily available from the papers of the 1974-75 public inquiry.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Human Rights (Broadcasting)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to apply to the content of British broadcasting media the principle embodied in Her Majesty's Government's documentation for the Helsinki states information forum that the free flow of information both within countries and across frontiers is seen by the West as an integral part of human rights provisions.

Mr. Renton: The principle of the free exchange of information and ideas, guaranteed by article 10 of the European convention on human rights, is central to our broadcasting policy. We have played an active part in the preparation of the Council of Europe's convention on transfrontier television, which we hope will be opened for signature next month and which we plan to implement through the forthcoming Broadcasting Bill. The convention is designed to encourage the transfrontier circulation of television programme services on the basis of a number of commonly agreed basic standards. As our White Paper "Broadcasting in the 90's: Competition Choice and Quality" makes clear, the development of European regulatory instruments of this kind is consistent with the approach of the Government towards domestic broadcasting services in establishing an enabling regulatory framework to allow increased opportunities for broadcasters and viewers, while ensuring the maintenance of satisfactory programme standards.

Airports (Passports)

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British international airports still retain a passport entry desk for United Kingdom citizens only.

Mr. Renton: None.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all European Community countries have agreed to discontinue national channels at passport control entry at airports in favour of joint ones for European Community citizens.

Mr. Renton: This is a matter for national decision and practice varies throughout the Community. Where passenger volume makes it desirable to present passengers to more than one channel most EC countries direct all EC nationals to a special channel.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why entry desks for British citizens only at passport control at Heathrow have been discontinued.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend announced to the House on 14 December 1988, at column 576, the Government's intention to introduce in the spring a single immigration channel for all nationals of the EC (including British nationals) entering the country. Implemented from 10 March, this is a practical demonstration of our readiness, in line with the spirit of the Single European Act, to reduce as far as possible the levels of immigration checks on other EC nationals. There has been no change in our arrangements for immigration controls on nationals of non-EC countries.

Electoral Register

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what approximate percentage of people eligible to vote are not currently registered to vote; and if such people will be able to register prior to *(a)* country and *(b)* European elections.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The most recent major study into the accuracy of the electoral register ("Electoral Registration in 1981", Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1982) estimated that 6·7 per cent of people in England and Wales eligible to vote were not registered to do so. Under section 11(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) claims for inclusion in the published register can be made at any time. However, no such claim can have effect for the purposes of an election unless it is allowed, and the alteration made, before the close of nomination for candidates at that election. It is therefore now too late for such claims to have effect at either the county council or European parliamentary elections.

Mr. Joe Benjamin

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will recommend the granting of a pardon to Joe Benjamin in relation to a conviction on appeal by Knightsbridge Crown court and the imposition of a fine of £150 under an offence under the Public Order Act, in respect of the case of Regina v Benjamin, 29 October 1987, before Mr. Recorder Walker.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend will consider Mr. Benjamin's conviction if he is presented with any new evidence or other consideration of substance which calls its safety into question and which has not been before the courts.

Radio Tara Ltd

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the Irish Government's award of a frequency to Radio Tara Ltd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have received letters from the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the Association of Independent Radio Contractors, two independent local radio stations and a number of hon. Members expressing concern at the effect which the proposed Irish station might have on United Kingdom radio broadcasting. We are in touch with the Irish authorities on the issue.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the time taken to deal with interviews referred by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office concerning entry clearance in Manchester and London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I would refer the hon. Member to my reply of 23 March, at column *809*, in answer to his earlier question. It remains the objective in Manchester and London, as elsewhere, to carry out interviews within three months of receipt of papers in the United Kingdom.

Residential Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is made available from computerised police records to social services departments, residential homes and other organisations offering care to vulnerable people who are considering the suitability of applicants for employment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Arrangements have been set up which allow the police to disclose information to local authorities, the health service and independent schools about those seeking to work in posts with substantial access to children.

The information disclosed would include details of convictions, cautions and bind overs. Other relevant information, such as details of acquittals, or decisions not to prosecute, where the circumstances of the case would give cause for concern, may also be disclosed exceptionally, on the authority of an assistant chief constable.

Some of this information may be held in computerised records.

Ashwell Prison (Food Poisoning)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the recent outbreak of food poisoning at Ashwell prison; and what steps are being taken to prevent any further outbreaks.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: An outbreak of suspected salmonella food poisoning occurred at Her Majesty's prison, Ashwell on 11 April 1989. 145 inmates reported

sick between 11 and 13 April. Two were admitted to a local hospital and two to the prison hospital. The remainder did not require hospitalisation. The local authority environmental health officer together with a registrar from the public health laboratory have been assisting prison service personnel in tracing the source of the outbreak.

Investigations continue and once the cause of the infection is known remedial action will be taken.

Football Grounds (Safety)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the costs and *(b)* the reduction in safe ground attendance capacity, of introducing his plan of seating only at all first division clubs.

Mr. Hurd: As I said in my statement on Monday 17 April, the Government will be discussing with the football authorities the implications of moving towards all seated stadia for the major football clubs.

Community Charge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that those people who may be exempted from the community charge due to severe mental impairment will still retain their right to vote.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Payment of the community charge is not one of the qualifications for the franchise. It continues to be the duty of the electoral registration officer to have a house-to-house or other sufficient inquiry made as to the persons entitled to be registered to vote.

Broadcasting White Paper

Sir Peter Blaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the proposals in the broadcasting White Paper on local services.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to all those who responded to the invitation to comment on these radical proposals.

As the White Paper undertook, we have considered carefully all the views which have been expressed. In the light of them we have decided to make some adjustments to our original proposals. I am placing in the Library of the House a note which details the modified proposals which we intend to recommend to Parliament.

We continue to believe that there should be a new, flexible technology-neutral framework for local services, leaving operators free to decide upon the best mix of technologies. As the White Paper noted, this will in practice mean at present cable or MVDS, or a mixture of the two. The fact that we are proposing that local operators should in future have the choice to use technologies other than cable does not imply, as some commentators have suggested, that the Government do not foresee a prominent role for cable under the proposed new framework. The advantages of cable over other delivery technologies are well known; and we have been pleased to see that many recent applicants for cable franchises have plans to exploit these advantages in order to provide telecommunications as well as television services over their networks. The point of the freedom, which we are proposing should be offered to operators, is to enable them to choose which delivery technology or combination of technologies to use, based on their commercial judgment of the nature of the services for which there will be a demand.

The new framework will be designed to allow operators themselves to choose the nature and level of service they wish to offer their customers. It is, however, important for all local delivery systems to meet certain standards relating not only to safety and interference, but also, for example, to compatibility between systems and equipment. The Government, after consulting all interested parties, will decide how this is to be achieved.

In line with the White Paper, we propose that the new framework should be based on 15-year local franchises awarded by the new Independent Television Commission (ITC). Although we have considered carefully the contrary opinions which have been expressed, we hold to the view that some form of competitive tender mechanism will be the best method for allocating franchises. It will provide an objective method for choosing between applicants, and also takes account of the fact that successful applicants will be acquiring the exclusive right to use scarce MVDS frequencies. We will be giving further thought to the precise form of the competitive tender mechanism, taking due account of the arrangements decided upon for the allocation of licences for channels 3 and 5.

We envisage that, initially at least, only one franchise is likely to be awarded for any given area. It will be open to the ITC to award a second franchise if it chooses to do so; but we are no longer proposing that it should be required; as the White Paper envisaged, to consider advertising a further franchise or franchises for an area a short time after awarding the initial franchise there.

The aspect of the White Paper proposals which has attracted most comment is the suggestion that local delivery operators should not, except at the discretion of the ITC, be permitted to retail programme services. The objective of this proposal was to provide additional scope for competition in the retailing of programme services. While we still attach importance to this objective, we accept the argument put by many commentators that the White Paper proposal could inhibit investment in local delivery networks. We now therefore propose that local operators should be able to retail programme services without restriction, and without the need for permission from the ITC.

The Government do, however, see a case for injecting some competition into the local delivery and retailing of services by loosening the present restrictions on the development of satellite master antenna television (SMATV) systems. The Cable Authority's policy towards the licensing of SMATV systems has flowed from its statutory duty to exercise its licensing powers in such a way as to promote broadband cable systems. As the White Paper indicated, the ITC will not have such a duty.

We therefore believe that the restrictions placed on SMATV hitherto could not be sustained under the new framework, and we are proposing a significant, though not total, liberalisation of SMATV systems.

Under these proposals systems covering single buildings or adjacent pairs of homes sharing a party wall will be automatically licensed by means of a class licence under the Telecommunications Act 1984. Systems larger than this and covering not more than 1,000 homes would be individually licensed under that Act provided that, in the case of an application for a system within a franchise

area, the local delivery operator (or cable operator) had been given the right of first refusal to provide a service within a reasonable timescale. Unlike local delivery operators SMATV operators would not be granted telecommunications code powers, which would in practice make it difficult for them to build systems covering more than 1,000 homes. This size limit would in any case be applied flexibly. These proposals will be subject to review in the light of experience with any changes in its existing SMATV policy which the Cable Authority decides to make.

Licensed SMATV operators would be able to carry any channels licensed by the ITC or originating from states signatory to either or both of the proposed Council of Europe convention on transfrontier television or the EC directive on broadcasting (assuming they come into affect). A system carrying channels falling outside either of these categories would need to be licensed separately by the ITC.

The White Paper proposed that local operators should be liable to levy while they retained a local monopoly. We have, however, been persuaded on balance that it would be sensible not to introduce a new levy on local services. Whereas the White Paper proposed that broadcasting levies should mainly be based on advertising revenue, revenue from locally sold advertising appears at present unlikely to become a major source of finance for local services. Furthermore, we acknowledge the risk perceived by some commentators that the liability to levy might deter investment in a young industry, and we believe that this outweighs the benefits to the public purse of the modest amount of revenue which a levy might have yielded.

We have given further thought to the choice of frequencies for MVDS. We have concluded that the pressures on the 2·5 GHz band, the uncertainties surrounding possible future international developments and the limited amount of spectrum that could at best be made available combine to make this band unsuitable for MVDS. We have also ruled out the band 27-29 GHz since the 40 GHz band has similar characteristics and the significant advantages of larger amounts of spectrum, no existing incumbents and is, in part, internationally designated for broadcasting.

The White Paper also canvassed the possibility of frequencies being made available in the 12 GHz band. This band and that at 40 GHz have different characteristics and competing advantages and disadvantages. We shall need to consider further from which band, or bands, frequencies should be allocated to MVDS. In order to assess the reactions of potential users, now that we have put forward these firm proposals on local services, the Department of Trade and Industry will issue a short discussion paper early in May. We fully recognise the undesirability of continuing uncertainty over the choice of frequencies for MVDS, but this is an important decision which needs to take account of the interests of all parties, including other potential users of the spectrum, from whom the Government would welcome views.

Many in the cable industry have argued that the present prohibition in the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984 on non-EC control of cable licences should be lifted, and that no such prohibition should be placed on local delivery franchises under the proposed new framework. We have been giving careful thought to these representations in the context of our consideration of the general question of restrictions on the ownership and control of broadcasting licences. We hope to announce our views on this whole area before too long.

As foreshadowed in the White Paper, we propose that all cable operators awarded franchises before the date of its publication (7 November 1988) should have the right to opt to become technology-neutral delivery operators under the proposed new framework. We have decided to propose that this right should also be extended to these applications for franchises which had to be submitted by 7 November and which were eventually successful. In both cases the right will apply only to franchise holders who have been awarded a licence by the Cable Authority before it ceases to exist.

Under our proposals operators in this category will, if they so choose, be licensed as local delivery operators as of right by the ITC when it is set up. As such they will be entitled to use MVDS to deliver services to the home, subject to the availability of spectrum. It will be for the ITC to decide what frequencies can be made available to any operators who take this option. It may not always be possible for it to make available sufficient frequencies to cover an operator's entire franchise area.

Cable operators who obtain their franchises after this cut-off date and who are awarded a licence by the Cable Authority will, under our proposals, retain their status as operators licensed under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984 for the remainder of the terms of their licences. The ITC will discharge in relation to such licences the duties now undertaken by the Cable Authority.

HEALTH

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of *(a)* nursing homes and residential homes and *(b)* beds in the Merseyside and north-west regions, by district health authority in (i) the public and (ii) the private sectors.

Mr. Mellor: We do not have this information in the form requested. Information on the number of residential homes and places in the north western social services region, by local authority, in local authority, voluntary and private accommodation for years prior to 31 March 1986 is published in "Residential Accommodation for Elderly and Younger Physically Handicapped People: All Residents in Local Authority, Voluntary and Private Homes year ending 31 March England" and "Homes and Hostels for Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped People at 31 March England". Provisional information for 1987 is given in the tables.

There are two experimental nursing homes within the NHS, one of 25 beds for frail elderly patients in Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde health authority and one of 21 beds for elderly mentally ill patients, in Liverpool health authority. The available information on independent nursing homes is published in form SBH 212. Information at 31 March 1988 will be available shortly. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Number of residential care homes and places in North Western social services region, as at 31 March 1987 (revised)

	Elderly and younger physically handicapped		[1] Mentally ill		[1] Mentally handicapped		[2][3] Other client groups	
	Homes	Places	Homes	Places	Homes	Places	Homes	Places
NORTH WESTERN REGION								
Local Authority Homes								
Cheshire	62	2,134	16	105	31	390	0	0
Lancashire	98	3,985	10	101	36	568	0	0
Bolton	16	706	5	25	3	74	0	0
Bury	11	462	0	0	4	73	0	0
Manchester	46	1,842	19	111	41	311	1	16
Oldham	21	671	6	41	4	89	0	0
Rochdale	18	608	2	21	5	72	0	0
Salford	21	831	3	40	8	127	0	0
Stockport	17	637	10	50	18	130	0	0
Tameside	13	459	1	6	5	103	0	0
Trafford	12	521	2	6	2	55	0	0
Wigan	19	824	1	16	14	184	0	0
Knowsley	5	222	1	13	6	104	0	0
Liverpool	30	1,441	11	92	3	163	0	0
Sefton	18	705	4	27	7	107	0	0
St. Helens	7	316	1	20	4	93	0	0
Wirral	26	983	1	10	18	187	0	0
Total	440	17,347	93	684	209	2,830	1	16
Voluntary Homes								
Cheshire	13	775	5	57	3	80	1	11
Lancashire	20	691	0	0	7	175	0	0
Bolton	3	74	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bury	4	392	0	0	1	62	0	0
Manchester	8	233	1	39	0	0	0	0
Oldham	0	0	2	39	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salford	7	201	0	0	2	29	0	0
Stockport	1	36	0	0	1	12	0	0
Tameside	2	83	1	11	0	0	0	0
Trafford	5	122	0	0	2	45	0	0
Wigan	1	16	0	0	1	10	0	0
Knowsley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	21	719	2	38	7	156	2	29
Sefton	24	1,075	1	22	0	0	0	0
St. Helens	3	94	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wirral	7	172	0	0	3	49	1	14
Total	119	4,673	12	206	27	618	4	54
Private Homes								
Cheshire	63	1,083	1	17	3	26	0	0
Lancashire	463	6,768	2	13	17	123	0	0
Bolton	25	405	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bury	10	181	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manchester	48	700	6	98	1	28	0	0
Oldham	28	528	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	15	329	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salford	8	194	0	0	1	12	0	0
Stockport	41	588	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tameside	19	319	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trafford	43	613	6	36	0	0	0	0
Wigan	12	216	1	9	0	0	0	0
Knowsley	4	63	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	24	496	1	25	0	0	0	0
Sefton	109	1,816	1	8	7	110	0	0
St. Helens	3	92	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wirral	58	946	2	30	14	82	0	0
Total	973	15,337	20	236	43	381	0	0

[1] Includes unstaffed homes and hostels.
[2] Collected from 1987 onwards.
[3] Includes alcohol and drug misusers.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of hearing aid centres, and their location, by district health authority.

Mr. Mellor: Since the procurement and distribution of hearing aids has been administered by Mersey regional health authority on behalf of the National Health Service, a list of hearing aid centres has not been maintained centrally.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has as to the usage of National Health Service hearing aids, once dispensed.

Mr. Mellor: The Institute of Hearing Research estimated in a survey conducted between 1980 and 1986 that 76 per cent. of National Health Institute hearing aids dispensed to adults were in regular use.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to ensure that better information is available to people with a hearing loss as to the help available;

(2) what is done to ensure that those issued with National Health Service hearing aids are given adequate advice and instruction on how to derive benefit.

Mr. Mellor: Anyone worried about his hearing should first consult his general practitioner. Where necessary, the patient will be referred to a hospital for examination by a consultant who, if appropriate, will refer the patient to a hearing aid centre for the correct hearing aid to be fitted. Audiological technicians will provide advice and information on how to use and maintain hearing aids and all new users are given a copy of the Department's booklet which explains how to use a hearing aid. Some health authorities also employ hearing therapists to assist people requiring particular rehabilitative help.

We are at present giving careful consideration to suggestions for changes in the current arrangements for the provision of hearing aid services in response to the "Fair Hearing" campaign launched by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

NHS Employees (Freedom of Speech)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what disciplinary sanctions are available to Health Service managers in relation to any public comments made about the National Health Service, the health authority or any National Health Service matter by National Health Service employees;

(2) what restrictions on freedom of speech are incorporated in the contracts of those working within the National Health Service.

Mr. Mellor: Disciplinary action and the terms of individual contracts of employment for National Health Service employees are matters for individual employing health authorities.

Hospital Statistics

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hospital in-patients were treated in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1959;

(2) how many beds there were in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1959;

(3) what was the size of the in-patient waiting list at National Health Service hospitals on 31 March in each year since 1959;

(4) how many hospital day cases were treated in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1959;

(5) how many hospital out-patients were treated in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1959.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table.

National Health Service hospitals activity, 1959 to 1987-88

Thousands

Year	In-patient cases treated	[4]Day cases	Out-patients New	Out-patients Total attendances	[1]Ward attenders	Average daily available beds	[2,3]In-patient waiting list
1959	3,782·7	—	6,872·3	27,768·4	—	448·8	447·5
1960	3,911·1	—	6,913·0	28,281·7	—	447·5	443·0
1961	4,035·4	—	6,975·2	28,391·8	—	442·3	450·7
1962	4,149·6	—	6,978·0	28,590·0	—	440·3	446·8
1963	4,318·0	—	7,026·5	28,707·0	—	439·2	454·2
1964	4,455·1	—	7,265·4	29,887·4	—	438·4	476·4
1965	4,540·2	—	7,240·2	30,024·2	—	437·4	492·1
1966	4,616·7	—	7,356·1	30,372·4	—	434·8	510·4
1967	4,722·4	—	7,482·3	30,974·9	—	434·4	509·5
1968	4,848·2	—	7,505·2	31,382·7	—	432·1	505·1
1969	4,968·4	—	7,629·7	31·801·4	—	428·7	532·4
1970	5,011·7	—	7,744·6	32,354·8	—	423·6	525·9
1971	5,170·8	—	7,918·6	33,129·2	—	419·6	493·7
1972	5,223·0	376·5	7,926·6	33,243·5	—	412·7	479·2
1973	5,132·3	408·5	7,916·1	33,317·9	—	403·5	508·6
1974	5,171·7	449·6	7,824·8	33,352·1	—	396·2	517·4
1975	4,975·8	421·7	6,925·9	30,947·5	—	387·6	588·5
1976	5,254·6	480·5	7,498·5	32,396·4	—	383·1	583·9
1977	5,345·0	536·2	7,612·1	33,282·2	—	375·9	595·5
1978	5,370·3	562·2	7,711·9	33,950·3	—	369·2	603·2
1979	5,400·1	592·1	7,713·5	34,099·7	—	361·7	752·4
1980	5,670·0	670·8	7,942·2	35,243·0	—	356·0	664·9
1981	5,759·9	713·9	8,024·7	35·571·4	—	351·7	628·3
1982	5,719·6	706·5	8,097·0	35,651·2	—	348·1	622·5
1983	6,018·6	813·2	8,310·9	36,519·6	—	343·1	726·2
1984	6,177·5	902·9	8,508·1	37,042·7	—	334·5	692·9
1985	6,353·8	962·8	8,682·1	37,440·3	—	325·5	674·5
1986	6,413·8	1,050·2	8,767·8	37,727·6	—	315·7	673·1
1987					—		687·9
1987-88	6,619·4	1,005·0	8,529·8	36,874·3	774·3	297·3	678·8

[1] Ward attenders are a new category of patient. Some of them may previously have been classified as out-patients or days cases.
[2] Figures as at 31 March are only available from 1976. Data for previous years are for 31 December.
[3] Total less self deferred for 31 March 1988.
[4] Day case figures were not collected before 1972. The figure for 1987-88 is provisional.

NHS Doctors

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were employed in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1959, expressed in terms of whole-time equivalents.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Hospital medical staff in England and Wales[1]

Year	*Whole time equivalent*
1959	16,033
1960	16,584
1961	16,932
1962	17,557
1963	17,971
1964	18,346
1965	18,905
1966	19,541
1967	20,395
1968	21,232
1969	22,001
1970	22,585
1971	23,806
1972	25,043
1973	26,151
1974	26,999
1975	28,441
1976	29,251
1977	30,047
1978	30,998
1979	32,142
1980	33,257
1981	34,047
1982	34,538
1983	35,261
1984	35,430
1985	35,940
1986	36,317
1987	36,298

[1] Information is given for England and Wales because it is not available for England only prior to 1971.

Notes:

1. Figures include permanent paid and honorary staff but exclude locums and staff in the special hospitals.
2. To maintain comparability to data hospital practitioners and clinical assistants (para 94) have been excluded throughout.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on the National Health Service in each year since 1959, at constant prices.

Mr. Freeman: The table shows expenditure on the NHS inclusive of charges in each year since 1959 in constant 1988 prices. The figures have been derived from the United Kingdom national accounts prepared by the Central Statistical Office.

£ million

Year	*Gross*[1]
1959	7,173
1960	7,776
1961	8,066
1962	8,134
1963	8,486
1964	8,947
1965	9,052
1966	9,465
1967	10,124
1968	10,585
1969	10,851
1970	11,596
1971	12,124
1972	12,982
1973	13,651
1974	16,245
1975	17,308
1976	17,799
1977	17,561
1978	18,092
1979	18,374
1980	19,710
1981	20,348
1982	19,968
1983	21,445
1984	21,583
1985	21,840
1986	22,648
1987	23,683
1988	24,186

[1] Gross National Health Service expenditure at 1988 prices.

Dependent Territories (NHS Treatment)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the detailed arrangements for implementing the new scheme under which medical referrals to the United Kingdom for free National Health Service treatment will be allowed for patients from the dependent territories of Montserrat, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands and St. Helena; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Detailed arrangements for implementing the scheme, which began on 1 April 1989, are still under discussion with the territories involved. For the moment, however, where cases arise we have suggested that territories should make contact with the Department of Health, which will recommend suitable treatment centres for individual patients. The operation of the scheme will be kept under review in the light of experience.

Sonia Cabey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if payment is now to be waived of the costs of treating the late Sonia Cabey of Montserrat under the National Health Service at the Brompton hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Overseas Development Administration has paid the costs of the private treatment received by Miss Cabey.

Organ Transplants

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received seeking assurances that adoptive parents and adoptive brothers and sisters are not precluded from donating organs for transplant;

(2) what representations he has received seeking assurances that spouses will not be precluded from donating organs for transplant.

Mr. Freeman: None. The Human Organ Transplants Bill, now before the House, is not intended to deny individuals the opportunity of donating organs for altruistic motives.

Under the provisions of the Bill, the transplantation of a human organ from a live donor who is not genetically related to the recipient will be permitted if certain conditions are satisfied. These conditions will be the subject of regulations to be drawn up following consultation with the profession and other bodies.

Adult Placement Schemes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, following the recent conclusions of the survey of adult placement schemes conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, he proposes to encourage the growth of such schemes.

Mr. Mellor: Adult placement schemes have their place in the full range of community care provision. It is for local social services authorities to decide what services to provide in the light of local needs and opportunities and the overall level of resources available. We are considering the funding and organisation of community care generally in the light of Sir Roy Griffiths' report and hope to bring forward our proposals in the near future.

Doncaster Health Authority (Chairman)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the name of the new chairman of the Doncaster health authority, the date his appointment will commence, his terms of contract, and his annual salary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The current chairman has resigned with effect from 1 June 1989. The name and term of office of the new chairman will be announced shortly. Chairmen are entitled to receive remuneration which currently stands at £11,868 a year. If they choose not to receive this they may in certain circumstances be eligible to claim financial loss allowance.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish information on *(a)* the total number of appeals, *(b)* the number of appellants who were represented, and *(c)* the number of appellants in both these categories where appeals were successful for each of the social security appeal tribunals in the Strathclyde and County Durham areas for each of the years since 1980.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: National administrative statistics for social security appeal tribunals are not disaggregated for areas smaller than a social security region.

Information is not available in the form requested prior to 1984. The tables give the required information from 1984 to the quarter ending September 1988 (the latest figures available).

Social Security appeal tribunals

Period	*Total number of appeals heard*	*Total number represented*	*Total in claimant's favour*	*Total number not represented*	*Total in claimant's favour*
Scotland					
Nine months ending December 1984	11,252	3,332	1,551	7,920	1,355
12 months ending December 1985	19,003	6,133	3,016	12,870	2,304
12 months ending December 1986	22,561	6,464	3,203	16,097	2,959
12 months ending December 1987	31,819	9,713	4,922	22,106	4,138
Nine months ending September 1988	36,467	11,921	6,990	24,546	6,554
North East					
Nine months ending December 1984	11,757	2,757	1,141	9,000	1,400
12 months ending December 1985	18,724	4,003	1,677	14,721	2,206
12 months ending December 1986	20,040	4,288	1,951	15,752	2,702
12 months ending December 1987	27,198	5,106	2,231	22,092	3,312
Nine months ending September 1988	27,364	5,905	2,850	21,459	3,597

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Department has a total of seven Siemens ND3 printers in use, located at the following buildings:

Location	*Number of printers in use*
DSS, Government Buildings, Moorland Road, Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire	3
DSS, Hesketh House, 22-202 Broadway, Fleetwood, Lancashire	2
DSS, Durham House, Town Centre, Washington, Tyne and Wear	2

None is in use through private contract.

Refuges

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to ensure that after 9 October all refuge rents, of however short a duration, will be paid.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: From 9 October people who now receive income support at hostel rates (including those in refuges) will be treated in the same way as hostel dwellers not on income support and will need to claim housing benefit to help with the accommodation element of the hostel charge. The housing benefit regulations already allow entitlement to housing benefit to accrue on a daily basis, provided the liability is daily. Regardless of the basis on which housing benefit is calculated it cannot be paid more frequently than weekly, and normally no more often than fortnightly. It will generally be for the claimant to pay any balance of the charge which housing benefit does not meet (including any amount for fuel or meals) from their income support or other resources.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, after 9 October, young women claimants will be paid the same amount of income support as other women in refuges, whether they are parents or not.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: From 9 October 1989 the normal income support rules will apply to all women living in refuges. Their applicable amount will be made up of a personal allowance plus allowances for any dependent children living with them and any premiums which may be appropriate. All of these elements are related either to age or to whether or not the claimant is a parent.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when details of transitional payments to refuges will be made available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are introducing special arrangements to assist existing hostels and claimants after the implementation of the changes to income support for hostel dwellers in October 1989. Payments to hostels will initially be made by DSS local offices, and subsequently from a central unit which will be set up in the Department. This unit will be responsible for monitoring the effects of the reform on individual hostels, and making payments to compensate for resulting loss in revenue from charges currently met by income support. In finalising these arrangements consideration will be given to the views of the hostel sector through discussions which are already under way.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what extra financial help will be given to local authorities to assist in the extra workload when housing benefit replaces board and lodgings payments for women and children staying in refuges.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Proposals for supporting local authorities' costs in handling the additional workload arising from the inclusion of hostel dwellers in the housing benefit scheme are due to be discussed shortly with the local authority associations. Local authorities will be advised of the additional support to be made available to them as soon as these discussions have been completed.

Income Support

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security where after 9 October, the shortfall between a woman and two children being entitled to £80.40 board and lodgings and the new £61.75 income support will come from; and whether there will be any conditions attached to any shortfall money given.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: From October 1989 people living in hostels, in common with the majority of households, will be eligible for housing benefit to help with their accommodation costs and normal income support to help with other necessities. Claimants living in hostels at the time of the change who would otherwise suffer a drop in their disposable income, after the full hostel charge has been met, will receive special payments from the Department. These payments will continue for as long as the claimant continues to live at the same hostel. They will be reduced only as normal income support rates increase.

Pensions

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement setting out details of the costs of the proposed enhanced pensions referred to in his Department's letter reference LS619/243/2 DML/17/89 which will be payable to staff on leaving his Department.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not possible to detail the costs of pensions under flexible early retirement (FER) as each case is assessed according to grade, salary, number of years reckonable service, age, etc. As the actual decision whether to retire is for the officer alone, it is not possible to anticipate the number of payments. Provision is however made within the Departmental budget.

Shettleston Office

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he is now able to state the exact date when work will start on the construction of his Department's new office in Shettleston.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am unable to state the exact date, but present indications are that work will start on site at the beginning of next month.

Taxes and Benefits

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Hornchurch, 17 February, *Official Report*, column *393*, to take account of the freeze in child benefit in April.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the answer of 17 February to the hon. Member for Hornchurch, (Mr. Squire) *Official Report*, column *393*, concerning marginal tax and benefit withdrawal rates facing households, to take account of the proposed benefit uprating in April and the estimated effect of the changes to the national insurance system announced by Mr. Chancellor in the 1989 Budget.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answers 22 March and 7 April 1989]:* Taking account of the effect of the March 1989 Budget and the reform of the employees' national insurance contributions reforms which occur in October, it is estimated that in 1989-90 a total of 420,000 working

heads with 1 million adult and child dependants may sometimes experience combined marginal rates of deduction exceeding 50 per cent.

ENVIRONMENT

House Condition Survey

Mr. John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish by *(a)* tenure, *(b)* income and *(c)* age of head of household, the following information gathered for the English house condition survey *(a)* the number of homes with rising damp, penetrating damp, slight would mould growth, serious mould growth, excissive draughts, *(b)* the number of houses with seriously defective, defective, just acceptable, satisfactory and unknown dampness and provide written material used in instructing surveyors on how to intepret these categories and on how to decide whether a dwelling was unfit for human habitation under the Housing Act 1955 for reason of dampness or other reason and *(c)* to tabulate slight and serious mould growth by main types of exterior wall;

(2) if he will publish by *(a)* tenure, *(b)* income, *(c)* age of head of household, *(d)* employment status, *(e)* age of dwelling, *(f)* type of heating system and *(g)* main fuel type, where applicable, the following information gathered in the interview survey for the English home condition survey: (i) questions 19a, 19c, 19d, 19f, (ii) questions 21 to 23c, (iii) questions 24 to 26b, (iv) questions 28 to 42, (v) question 44 and (vi) question 48.

Mr. Trippier: As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government indicated in Standing Committee G on 20 April, information on these topics will be published in a supplementary report on the English house condition survey.

Housing Investment

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list at 1987-88 outturn prices local authorities' housing capital investment *(a)* in Greater London, *(b)* in other metropolitan areas, *(c)* in non-metropolitan areas; *(d)* in the non-metropolitan areas in the south-east and *(e)* in England (i) during 1980-81, (ii) during 1982-83, (iii) during 1984-85 and (iv) during 1986-87 (1) in new building, (2) in renovation of their existing stock, (3) in renovation grants, (4) in loans to housing associations and (5) in other housing activities.

Mr. Trippier: I have today placed tables giving the relevant information in the Library.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to have included in the recently completed global convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes, organised under the auspices of the United Nations environment programme, radioactive wastes amongst the controlled substances.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. This is unnecessary. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the appropriate United Nations body dealing with all aspects of radioactive substances.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the figures in tonnes for imports of special waste to the United Kingdom; if he will break those figures down by country of origin; from which ports these imports left, giving figures in tonnes; and what was their destination port in the United Kingdom; in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 28 October 1988 at column *427*. It is not yet possible to update this information. Her Majesty's inspectorate of polluton expects to have the information from waste disposal authorities later this year.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will list those United Kingdom companies producing special waste currently incinerated at sea.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not held centrally to enable producers of special wastes for marine incineration to be identified. The decision as to whether a waste is special under the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980 is made by the waste producer. Notifications that result are held by the appropriate waste disposal authority.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the Government's response to the Environment Committee's report on toxic waste.

Mr. Ridley: I have today published the Government's response (Cm. 679). I am pleased that the Committee is in virtually complete agreement with the Government's proposals to improve the present system of waste management. These proposals have been put forward in a series of consultation papers over the last three years. Much progress has been made in this important but difficult area and legislation is now being prepared for introduction at the earliest opportunity.

I regret that the Committee has chosen to give little credit for this major reform covering the whole of waste legislation. Instead the Committee has chosen to make serious allegations about the waste management industry in this country which are not supported by the evidence presented in the body of the report. Indeed, the Committee records that it found little evidence of pollution from waste management processes in this country.

The Committee acknowledges that the United Kingdom is one of the few countries not to have developed its waste management policy in the wake of environmental disaster. But the Government believe that potential hazards should be anticipated and that the present legal framework can be strengthened to give the best possible protection for the future. The Committee has fully endorsed our proposals to extend legal responsibility to the producers of waste and to strengthen the existing law on licensing and the aftercare of landfills.

Neither are the Government confining their reforms to the present licensing system. We are also proposing to reform the waste disposal authorities themselves. In the only significant area of disagreement between the Government and the Committee, the Government do not propose to follow the recommendation to create new regional waste regulation authorities or an environmental protection agency. Instead, the Government propose to build on the strengths of the present system by separating

waste regulation from authorities' own operations and providing clearer and more accountable procedures for new waste regulation authorities to operate by.

The Government firmly believe that waste management practices in the United Kingdom are environmentally safe and our record, in comparison to many other countries, fully supports that view. The improvements to be made in legislation and enforcement will be our continuing safeguard against pollution from wastes for many years to come.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has given to those companies currently using ocean incineration to develop alternative means of disposal as a means of ending toxic waste incineration at sea, in line with the recommendations of the North sea ministerial conference.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have been asked to reply.

Officials of my Department have advised companies which currently hold licences for incineration of waste at sea of the need to seek alternative methods of disposal of their wastes. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is discussing alternative land-based disposal routes with the companies concerned. We fully expect to meet the timetable agreed at the second international conference on the protection of the North sea for phasing out marine incineration.

Sewage Disposal

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make public the costings and content for any work required at each of the sewage works controlled by the Severn-Trent water authority to meet any tightened consents approved by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, or other consents at the expiry of any of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution approved temporary relaxation.

Mr. Howard: On 7 December 1988 (*Official Report*, column *199*) I announced a capital programme involving expenditure of £900 to £1,000 million designed to bring substandard sewage works into compliance with their discharge consents by March 1992. Capital investment programmes are being discussed with the individual authorities concerned, including Severn-Trent, and detailed figures are not available.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the proposed sewer outfall pipe at Rossall Point, Fleetwood; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend has received about 16,000 representations regarding the proposed long sea outfall at Rossall Point. These representations will be taken into account before any decision is made on whether North West water authority's applications for discharge consents should be granted.

Water Authorities (Debts)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the total current capital debts of the 10 water authorities; and how much of those debts he intends to write-off on the privatisation of the industry.

Mr. Howard: Details of outstanding capital loans to water authorities are recorded in their respective annual reports and accounts, copies are available in the Library. The Water Bill will enable National Loans Fund and Public Works Loans Board debts to be written off and replaced as appropriate by a combination of equity and debentures. These powers will be used to put in place capital structures appropriate for the new companies.

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions and representations he has had about the collection of unpaid poll tax.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no intention of introducing a poll tax. We have discussed the community charge recovery system extensively with a wide range of interested bodies.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors influenced his decision to begin registration for the poll tax after, rather than before, the county council elections.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. My letter of 23 December 1988 to the chairman of the local authority associations sets out the reasons for the operative date of the regulations enabling community charge registration officers to require information from individuals for the purposes of compiling their registers. I am placing a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to provide protection to agricultural workers in tied housing in relation to the payment of the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: The personal community charge is not related to the type of property occupied. People in tied accommodation who are subject to it will, in common with all chargepayers, have the protection of the rebate scheme, which specifically links people's liability to their ability to pay.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to issue guidance to local authorities on the rights of access to local services of those community charge payers who are either living or registered in a local authority area for a short period of time due to their itinerant lifestyle.

Mr. Gummer: No.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if adults placed with carers on adult placement schemes will be required to pay poll tax.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce poll tax.

Exemption from the personal community charge depends on the circumstances of the individual concerned. Any exemption in cases described by the hon. Gentleman would depend on whether the individual qualifies for exemption on any of the grounds set out in schedule 1 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Conservation Areas (Trees)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what particulars he has specified in relation

to the provision of section 61(A)(7) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 concerning the need for district councils to keep a register of trees in conservation areas.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Section 61(A)(7) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 places a duty on district and London borough councils to compile and keep available for inspection a register of notices served on the council of intention to carry out work on trees in conservation areas, where such trees are not already protected by tree preservation orders or otherwise exempt. It also empowers the Secretary of State to determine what particulars should be included in such registers. The following matters were specified for this purpose in DOE circular 36/78:

(a) the address of the land on which the tree stands and sufficient information to identify the tree;
(b) details of the work proposed.

Water Charges

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the justification for the proposed increase in water charges by the Eastbourne waterworks; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in the charges to *(a)* domestic consumers on and off meters and *(b)* private industry and public undertakings.

Mr. Howard: It is for the company to satisfy itself that the charges that it levies are within its statutory powers. The specific information requested is not held centrally.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps will be taken after privatisation to stop the water supply undertakings from inflating their costs in order to inflate their profits.

Mr. Howard: After privatisation inflated costs will reduce the companies' profits because their charges levels will be limited. In reviewing the charges limits the Director General of Water Services will be able to obtain all the information needed to assess the cost of operation of an efficient undertaking, and to set the limits accordingly.

Rates

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his proposals for determining the allowance to be made to local authorities for the collection of non-domestic rates and for offsetting losses or collection against their contribution to the national non-domestic rate pool.

Mr. Gummer: Our proposals were published in a consultation paper on "Payments into the National Non-Domestic Rating Pool" issued on 16 March. The closing date for responses is 12 May and discussions with the local authority associations are continuing. I am placing copies of the consultation paper in the Library.

SSSIs (Planning Applications)

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the criteria which apply in considering whether a planning application affecting a site of special scientific interest should be referred to him.

Mr. Chope: Every request to call in a planning application is considered on the individual merits of the case. In general, applications are called in only if planning issues of more than local importance are involved. Such cases may include, for example, those which in our opinion could have wide effects beyond their immediate locality, which give rise to substantial regional or national controversy, which may conflict with national policy on important matters, and those where the interests of national security or of foreign Governments may be involved. In considering whether to call in an application affecting a site of special scientific interest the scale of the proposed development and the extent of its effect on the site would be relevant considerations to be taken into account.

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, in respect of each of the last three years, those cases where the Nature Conservancy Council has asked him to call in a planning application and indicate *(a)* those cases which were referred back to the planning authority to determine and *(b)* those cases which were determined in favour of the application.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Planning Permission (Revocations)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions since 1959 planning permission has been revoked; what compensation was paid on each occasion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: It is primarily for the local planning authority to decide, having regard to the development plan and to any other material consideration, whether to revoke any planning permission. Between April 1979 and December 1988 my right hon. Friend and his predecessors confirmed more than 1,300 revocation orders. Information is not available centrally about the number of unopposed orders which required no confirmation or about the amounts of compensation which were paid by local authorities.

Cryptosporidium

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what moves he has initiated, following the outbreak in February of diarrhoea and sickness caused by the waterborne parasite cryptosporidium, to ensure that every water authority has the expertise to carry out tests to detect cryptosporidium.

Mr. Howard: Monitoring methods necessary to detect cryptosporidium in water supplies are being examined by the group of experts established by the Government under the chairmanship of Sir John Badenoch. I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 2 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) at column *286*.

Bradford (Development)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any application from Bradford local authority of Arrocraft plc either separately or jointly for a city grant for the development of the Bradford West End scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: No formal application for city grant for the Bradford West End scheme has been received by the Department.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has had any applications for in and out agreements for the purchase of land for the West End development in Bradford by Bradford council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No.

Alaska Works Development, Southwark

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the commercial office development of the Alaska works development in Southwark and on the area of office accommodation made available under this scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Alaska works project has been offered city grant of £4,162,000. The project comprises the part refurbishment and part redevelopment of a former fur treatment works to provide a business complex of at least 127,000 sq. ft. of net lettable floor space. The space available will accommodate offices, workshops, studios and training facilities. Associated car parking facilities and a garden for use by local residents, and users of the development, will be provided.

Homelessness

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he is going to publish the findings of the study of homelessness carried out by the university of Birmingham's centre for urban and regional studies.

Mr. Trippier: The findings are published today. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library. We very much welcome this study which has lessons for both central and local government.

The report demonstrates clearly that homelessness is a complex problem which needs attacking on a number of fronts. Local authorities are generally doing a good job, but there is room for streamlining procedures and standardising the service to homeless people across local authorities. Conditions in temporary accommodation, and bed and breakfast in particular, are often poor and people are waiting for long periods to be rehoused into permanent accommodation.

The Department has considered the report carefully and the findings are providing a valuable contribution to our current review of homelessness legislation.

Rivers (Yorkshire)

Mr. Crowther: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a schedule showing the changes between 1987 and 1988 in the quality of rivers in the Yorkshire region, including the lengths over which improvement or deterioration has taken place.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* I understand that the lengths of rivers and canals recorded in each water quality class by the Yorkshire water authority were as follows:

Freshwater quality class — *Kilometres*

	1987	*1988*
1A Good quality	2,264	2,261
1B Good quality	2,198	2,141
2 Fair quality	779	839
3 Poor quality	629	646
4 Bad quality	165	148
Total	6,035	6,035

These figures are not directly comparable with those obtained from the 1985 river quality survey of England and Wales as they are based on more limited surveys carried out by the water authority.

Carbon (Levy)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the proposal agreed by the Toronto conference for a world levy on carbon as a basis for an environmental fund.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* One of the three working groups set up by the intergovernmental panel on climate change, in which the United Kingdom is playing a full part, is studying a variety of possible international response strategies, including financial and economic measures. The work is at an early stage but the IPCC has set itself the ambitious target of reporting by mid-1990.

Anti-competitive Practices

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, further to his answer of 17 April, *Official Report*, column *36*, to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) he will list the approximately 80 complaints of alleged anti-competitive practices identifying the local authorities involved.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* The Department has received complaints alleging anti-competitive behaviour by the following authorities:

Alnwich DC
Barking and Dagenham LB
Barnsley MBC
Barrow-in-Furness BC
Beverley BC
Birmingham CC
Bolton MBC
Braintree DC
Brighton BC
Bristol CC
Bromley LB
Broxbourne DC
Broxtowe BC
Buckinghamshire CC
Carlisle BC
Carrick DC
Charnwood BC
Christchurch DC
Cleveland CC
Corby DC
Cotswold DC
Darlington BC
Eastleigh BC
East Staffordshire DC
East Sussex CC
Ellesmere Port and Neston BC
Exeter CC
Forest of Dean DC
Gloucester CC

Gosport BC
Guildford BC
Halton BC
Havant BC
Hereford CC
Horsham DC
Hove BC
Lancashire CC
Leeds CC
Maidstone BC
Melton BC
Middlesbrough BC
Newark and Sherwood DC
Newbury DC
Norfolk CC
North Cornwall DC
North Yorkshire CC
Peterborough CC
Purbeck DC
Reading BC
Ribble Valley BC
Rochdale MBC
Rother DC
Rotherham BC
Rugby BC
Sedgefield DC
Sefton BC
South Buckinghamshire DC
South Kesteven DC
South Tyneside MBC
South Wight BC
Southwark LB
Stafford BC
Staffordshire Moorlands DC
Stevenage BC
Stroud DC
Tameside BC
Taunton Deane BC
Test Valley DC
Wakefield MBC
Waltham Forest LB
Worcester CC
Worthing BC
Wycombe DC
Wyre Forest DC
York CC

Bathing Water (Pollution)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the highest level of *(a)* E. coli and *(b)* total coliforms per 100 ml. found in the 1988 bathing waters survey at Seaton Carew centre, Hartlepool bay; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* full details of all the water samples at Seaton Carew centre that failed both the total coliform and the faecal coliform tests.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* The results obtained during the 1988 bathing season at the Seaton Carew centre sampling point are as follows:

Date	*Total coliforms number per 100 ml*	*Faecal coliforms number per 100 ml*
6 May 1988	110	80
20 May 1988	3,500	680
14 June 1988	3,700	1,200
24 June 1988	10	10
1 July 1988	13,000*	13,000*
15 July 1988	820	220
29 July 1988	3,100	600
3 August 1988	2,900	670
25 August 1988	3,700	2,000
31 August 1988	10,000	3,000*
2 September 1988	110,000*	110,000*
19 September 1988	3,000,000*	3,000,000*

Those results marked with an asterisk do not comply with the relevant imperative standard set in directive 76/160/EEC and those for 19 September are wholly exceptional. Northumbrian water authority has plans to improve the bathing waters at Seaton Carew to ensure that they consistently meet the EC standards.

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the cost of bringing beaches in Norfolk up to EEC standards; and from what date he expects the standards to be met.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* My right hon. Friend has asked Anglian water authority to draw up detailed plans with a view to bringing its bathing waters up to EC standards by 1995. Until these plans have been fully assessed it is not possible to give details of the cost involved.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department holds that enables him to assess the extent to which potable water in England complies with the European Community directive relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption (80/77/EEC).

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* The Department has information about supplies which regularly do not meet one or other of the standards in the directive and about programmes to achieve compliance. Information concerning supplies where there is occasional non-compliance is currently being submitted by water undertakers to the Department in the context of further improvement programmes.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost at current prices to each water authority in England of complying with the European Community directive relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption (80/77/EEC).

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 25 April 1989]:* Water undertakers have submitted to the Department projections of the costs involved in complying with the EC drinking water directive. We are reviewing these and discussing them with individual water undertakers. Until we have examined all the programmes it is not possible to estimate the costs. However, the programme will be included in prospectuses to be published later this year.

Church House, Westminster

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the European Economic Community guide levels and maximum admissible concentration levels for pollutants are exceeded by the drinking water supply in Church house, Westminster.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 19 April 1989]:* The maximum admissible concentrations for drinking water are exceeded for sodium and fluoride. Those exceeding the guide levels are chlorides, sulphates, zinc and iron.

DEFENCE

Low-flying Aircraft

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the new monitoring service he is installing to detect those low-flying service aircraft which disobey their given height instructions.

Mr. Neubert: The RAF police conduct surveys of military low flying in the United Kingdom from time to time to establish that height and other rules are being observed. Following trials, it has been decided that a Skyguard fire control radar system will be deployed in a low-flying monitoring role later this year and this should provide a valuable aid to the RAF police in this work. Surveys of low flying in the United Kingdom have shown that there is a healthy respect for low-flying regulations and the new system should provide further confirmation of the high standards and professionalism of the Royal Air Force.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for the new monitoring service used to detect aircraft flying below permitted levels to operate in the areas around Leamington Spa which are under the service training flight paths.

Mr. Neubert: The RAF police monitor low flying at different locations in the United Kingdom during the course of the year, but it is not our practice to release details of the programe in advance.

Command and Control System

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of the new computer system at the recently opened United Kingdom air defence ground defence environment command and control system, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire; why this computer system was originally specified to use four different programming languages; why it is being converted to a single language; what is the cost of this change; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Only part of the improved United Kingdom air defence ground environment (IUKADGE) command and control system (ICCS) will be at High Wycombe. Equipment and software costs of the entire system, of which NATO is paying over 80 per cent. will amount to some £225 million at September 1988 prices. It would not be meaningful, however, to identify the cost of part of the system in isolation.

The ICCS is being developed and installed by UKSL Ltd. under a fixed-price contract. The number of programming languages was not specified by the MOD and is the responsibility of the contractor.

Siemens Printers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Siemens ND3 printers are used by his Department, either in-house or through a private contract; and what is the location of each.

Mr. Sainsbury: Details of the many thousands of printers bought annually by the Department are not kept centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Department does not keep records of the printers used by the 10,000 or so companies which are under contract to the Department.

RAF Upper Heyford

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the compensation arrangements to be introduced at RAF Upper Heyford following his visit there on 19 April; and if he will include the name and address of the official to whom claims should be made.

Mr. Neubert: Details of the new compensation arrangements were announced at the presentation held at RAF Upper Heyford on 19 April and will be made known in the area by newspaper adverstising and by means of a leaflet delivered to every home within the area of the scheme.

From 17 May some 70 additional homes, including the whole village of Stoke Lyne, which fall within the average 70dB(A) contour will become eligible for a grant for the installation of acoustic secondary glazing to all bedrooms and up to two living rooms. In addition, the original noise insulation grant scheme is being re-opened for a period of six months from 17 May to allow the 35 or so residents who did not previously apply a further opportunity to do so.

It is Ministry of Defence policy to offer to purchase homes which are subject of average noise levels of 83dB(A) or more. There is no obligation to sell and this offer is made because some residents may find the noise unacceptably intrusive; not because of any risk to health or hearing. Letters have already been sent to all property owners within the new 83dB(A) contour informing them of the position.

Although the change of flight paths at RAF Upper Heyford does not satisfy the conditions laid down in the Land Compensation Act 1973 for the payment of injurious affection compensation, it has been decided, exceptionally, to consider claims for compensation. From 1 June 1989 owners of residential property (or small businesses with a rateable value of less than £2,250) in the vicinity of RAF Upper Heyford may submit claims if they believe that the value of their property has been adversely affected as a direct result of an increase in noise following the change in flight paths on 1 June 1988. Claims for such compensation will be considered independently by the district valuer in the light of the evidence available to him.

The noise compensation scheme at RAF Upper Heyford is being administered by the Defence Land Agent, Block D, Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 2DZ.

Arms Sales

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the value of military equipment exported under collaborative projects in the year 1987-88 was not the subject of memoranda of understanding which required the agreement of Her Majesty's Government before this equipment could be re-exported to third countries.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the context of Government collaborative ventures involving Her Majesty's Government, all military equipment exported in the year 1987-88 required the agreement of Her Majesty's Government.

Headquarters Contracts

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the reasons for the difference in the figures quoted on the value of headquarters contracts for goods and services destined for the British armed services awarded by his Department to Rolls-Royce Ltd. and Rolls-Royce plc in 1985-86 given in answers to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, *Official Report*, 4 April, columns *127-28* and 12 April, column *612*.

Mr. Sainsbury: The answers given earlier about Rolls-Royce plc responded to the terms of the questions, and gave information respectively on the payments made, at columns *127-28*, on 4 April, and value of contracts placed, at column *612*, on 12 April. Clearly there is a delay between placing a contract and payments being made against that contract.

Sir Colin Chandler

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make public details of the performance bonuses paid to Sir Colin Chandler as head of defence export services; and, in each case, when a performance bonus was paid and how it was earned.

Mr. Sainsbury: The terms under which Sir Colin Chandler is seconded from British Aerospace as head of defence export services at the Ministry of Defence do not provide for the payment of performance bonuses.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the captain's narrative of HMS Conqueror covering the years 1982-83 is still in the possession of the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Neubert: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the captain's narrative of HMS Conqueror's Falklands deployment. Copies of this are still held by the Ministry of Defence.

USA (Chemical Weapons)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to seek from the United States Secretary of Defence full publication of the United States chemical weapons stockpile at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Neubert: The United States has already made available a great deal of information concerning its chemical weapons stockpile: this includes details of its composition by agent type and percentage; the location of their CW storage facilities in the United States; and full details of the comprehensive United States programme for the destruction of its unitary CW stocks, which has resulted in the destruction of about 15 million pounds of chemical agent since 1970.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions have taken place with UK Nirex Ltd. on the future disposal options for military radioactive wastes.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Ministry of Defence is represented at official level at the quarterly Nirex customers' meetings, at which representatives of the civil radioactive waste producers are also present. There is in addition a series of technical working groups at which MOD is represented.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, during the NATO nuclear planning group meeting in Canada in April, consideration was given to the large public demonstration in Belgium against the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons in Europe.

Mr. Neubert: No.

USAF Aircraft

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United States Air Force A-10 Tank Buster aircraft based in the United Kingdom have crashed in the United Kingdom since 1 January; how many people have been killed in these accidents; whether any assessment has been made of the maximum credible accident that could arise from the training exercises involving these aircraft in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), at column *365*, on 24 April 1989. Every effort is made to conduct essential military aircraft training in as safe a way as is possible. It is not our practice to make statements about hypothetical events.

RN—Warsaw Pact Countries

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any contacts between the Royal Navy and Warsaw pact countries are planned.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In a move to increase contacts between the Royal Navy and Warsaw pact navies, the destroyer Warszawa, flagship of the Polish Navy, is to visit London from 9-12 May. In a reciprocal visit, HMS Bristol will visit Gdynia from 9-12 June as part of the Dartmouth training squadron's summer deployment to the Baltic.

On the same deployment, HMS Bristol will also visit Leningrad from 26-30 May. This will be the first Royal Navy visit to the Soviet Union since HMS Devonshire made a port call in Odessa in 1976, and only the second ship visit since 1966. An invitation has been extended to the Soviet Navy to send a warship to the United Kingdom.

RAF Mildenhall and Lakenheath

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the introduction at RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath of noise insulation grants and injurious affection compensation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: I am pleased to announce that, following analysis of the results of noise surveys in the vicinity of RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath, noise and injurious affection compensation schemes have been approved. From today the occupants of some 5,600 homes in the area will be eligible to claim a grant for the sound insulation of all bedrooms and up to two living rooms. The scheme also provides for the payment of injurious affection compensation, if there is evidence that the value of a residential property, or small business with a rateable

value of less than £2,250, was adversely affected by an increase in noise or other physical effects following the bringing into use of hardened aircraft shelters at the airfields in July 1983. As any increase in noise will have been limited to the immediate areas, claims for compensation will only be considered for those residents who live in close proximity to the hardened aircraft shelters.

An announcement is being made at RAF Lakenheathtoday to local councils and media and details of the scheme will be made known in the area by advertising and by means of a leaflet delivered to properties within the boundary of the scheme.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what modifications to the approach routes of military aircraft landing at RAF Lakenheath he expects to be introduced by the United States Air Force; and if these will reduce noise levels overhead in the residential areas of Brandon, Suffolk.

Mr. Neubert: A minor modification to the visual approach route at RAF Lakenheath has been made following discussions with the Army. This will allow aircraft in the visual pattern to turn over the Stanford training area when joining the final approach path. Although this will affect only a relatively small number of flights, there should be some reduction in the levels of disturbance experienced in residential areas of Brandon, though they will continue to be overflown. All other flight paths remain unchanged.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Research

13. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current level of funding of agricultural research.

25. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current level of funding of agricultural research.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government expect to spend £186 million on research and development in agriculture alone in this financial year. This amply demonstrates our strong commitment to the technological underpinning of the farming industry and to public good research in this area. This does not include the additional research and development on food, fisheries and related activities.

Countryside Commission

14. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the chairman of the Countryside Commission; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Ryder: I met the chairman of the Countryside Commission on 7 November, when we discussed many issues relating to the countryside. I am always ready to discuss matters of mutual concern with the Countryside Commission.

Containers (Disposal)

15. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy on the disposal of unwanted pesticides, veterinary products and associated containers.

Mr. Ryder: The policy of this Ministry is to make positive efforts to encourage compliance with the legal requirement, which is that all hazardous waste substances from agriculture including pesticides, veterinary products and their containers, should be disposed of safely and without harm to the environment.

Pesticides

16. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the list of pesticides approved for use on fruit.

Mr. Ryder: The independent advisory committee on pesticides is undertaking a programme of routine reviews of all pesticides, including those used on fruit, starting with those active ingredients which have been approved the longest and are most widely used. In addition emergency reviews will be carried out when particular concerns have been raised.

Hedgerows

17. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement about hedgerows.

Mr. Ryder: As I have explained to the hon. Gentleman before, we acknowledge the value of hedges as wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as their value for agricultural purposes. My Department is always ready to provide advice to farmers on hedgerow management, and grants are available for hedgerow planting and laying.

State Veterinary Service

18. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the state veterinary service.

43. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the state veterinary service.

Mr. MacGregor. As my hon. Friend said in a reply to the then hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. McTaggart) on 16 March, at column *345*, I consider it of great importance that this country should have a veterinary service dedicated to the maintenance of our high health status. I will ensure that this factor is taken into acount in the review of veterinary manpower which I announced on 11 April, at column *441*.

GATT

19. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the European Council last discussed the agricultural implications of the general agreement on tariffs and trade round.

Mr. MacGregor: The Agriculture and Foreign Affairs Councils at their meetings on 20-22 March discussed and

approved the Community's approach on agriculture for the GATT negotiations held in Geneva earlier this month. A successful agreement was reached there on a framework for negotiation on further agricultural reform. In Community discussions we are now encouraging the Commission to develop constructive proposals on how this is to be achieved.

26. **Sir Hal Miller:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Geneva talks on the agricultural aspects of the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made a statement to the House on 10 April, at columns 396-97, about the outcome of the recent GATT meeting. The agreement reached there on agriculture provides a firm basis for work to be carried forward on the ways and means of securing long-term policy reform. For the short term, it confirms that present levels of support and protection are not to be increased. We shall be urging the Community to press ahead with detailed work to build on and continue the process of agricultural reform that is already under way.

51. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the United States Agriculture Minister, Mr. Yeutter, on recent general agreement on tariffs and trade developments on agriculture.

Mr. MacGregor: I met Secretary Yeutter in Washington on 24 April. We had extensive discussions, concentrating in particular on the current GATT round. We both welcomed the agreement that had been reached in the GATT trade negotiations committee on 8 April and their firm basis that it now provides for negotiations on long-term reform of agricultural policies worldwide. We also agreed that the commitment not to increase support and protection beyond current levels will be an important contribution to this process.

Watercourses (Pollution)

20. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the pollution of watercourses by the agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement.

67. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made of the pollution of watercourses by the agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The total number of reported farm pollution incidents increased by 6 per cent. in 1988, although there was a 5 per cent. reduction in those classified serious. The Government are taking a number of steps to tackle this problem, incuding free general advice to farmers on pollution avoidance and the most generous grant-aid in the EEC. But Government action alone cannot solve it. It is the duty of every farmer to comply with the law, of the water authorities—soon the National Rivers Authority—to enforce it, and of the courts to set appropriate penalties.

Farm Support Systems

21. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is able to calculate, using a net value of support or subsidy index base of 100 for the United Kingdom, from the latest available figures, the equivalent current cost of farm support systems to the average family in (i) the United States of America (ii) Japan, (iii) Canada, (iv) Austria, (v) Sweden and (vi) Norway.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that information in the form requested is not available. However, published OECD studies provide some indications of the relative costs of agricultural support that prevailed on average in 1984-1986. The calculations take account of consumer transfers through higher food prices as well as direct budgetary expenditures. These studies include the European Community of 10 members as a whole, but not the United Kingdom separately. Figures have not yet been published for Sweden and Norway. If these OECD estimates are adjusted to per head of population, and the Community set at 100, they imply the following index numbers for that period: United States, 113; Japan, 142; Canada, 92; Austria, 86. Such comparisons should be treated with caution: they are sensitive to changes in exchange rates and other factors. Estimates for more recent years, when available, could well show different relationships, in particular for the United States whose currency has fallen substantially against the ECU and where spending on agricultural policies has been falling.

Sugar Beet Growers

22. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received from sugar beet growers.

Mr. MacGregor: We have recently received a number of representations from sugar beet growers and from the National Farmers Union on their behalf concerning the EC Commission's price proposals for sugar. This was prior to the settlement at the Agriculture Council last week.

Torry Research Station, Aberdeen

23. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last visited the Torry research station, Aberdeen.

Mr. Donald Thompson: On 31 August 1988.

Fish Farming

24. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to increase the level of Government funding for research and development in fish farming.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Government spent some £3·2 million on research and development in relation to fish farming in 1988-89 and plan for a similar level of expenditure in this financial year.

Agricultural Surpluses

27. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in reducing European Community agricultural surpluses.

Mr. Ryder: The measures agreed at the European Council in February 1988, notably on budgetary discipline and the reform of the CAP, have greatly reduced the incentive to surplus production.

Intervention stocks of most major commodities have reduced significantly. Stocks of butter are down by 94 per cent. since 1986. Cereals stocks are down about 60 per cent. since 1985. Skimmed milk powder stocks, which were over 1 million tonnes in 1986, are now virtually non-existent. Beef stocks are down about a half since 1985.

Potatoes

28. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the future of the Potato Marketing Board.

46. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of his review of the potato marketing scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 19 April 1989, at column 175.

RSPB

29. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the president of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend the Minister and I met the president of the RSPB council on 17 November, when we discussed the RSPB's consultation paper on the reform of the common agricultural policy.

I had a separate meeting with the chairman on 3 November, at which we discussed a wide range of issues. Both these meetings were helpful and constructive.

Veterinary Surgeons

30. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects that the assessment of the number of veterinary surgeons will reach its conclusions.

Mr. MacGregor: I hope to be able to announce the details of this review shortly, but am not yet in a position to say when it will reach conclusions. However, I am glad to note that the Universities Funding Council has put off consideration of the Riley report until the review is completed.

National Parks (Intensive Farming)

31. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will extend the scheme of payments to encourage less intensive farming in environmentally sensitive areas to cover national parks.

Mr. Ryder: I have no plans to extend the ESA scheme to cover all national parks.

Cod Fishing

32. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the latest position with regard to cod fishing in the channel.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In line with the wishes of the area VII industry advisory committee, we have adopted a management strategy for this year's Channel cod fishery designed to spread the annual quota availability as evenly as possible over the year, and to avoid, as possible, a repetition of last year's uninterrupted closure of six months. I have accordingly closed the fishery twice this year for time-limited periods, currently until 1 July. Latest estimates indicate that we took about half of our annual quota by Easter. I am fully aware of the difficulties facing cod fishermen, and I am pursing all possible means of adjusting the level of the quota.

35. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date the industry was informed of individual cod quotas for the current year.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Following agreement at the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 9-11 December 1989, quotas for the United Kingdom's cod fisheries were announced to the industry on 13 December 1988.

As regards the North sea and west of Scotland fisheries, the allocation of United Kingdom quotas among the various groups in the fisheries has this year given rise to new and important issues which have needed further consideration within Fisheries Departments. We are looking to conclude discussions as a matter of urgency and will be contacting the industry as soon as possible thereafter.

Licensed Netsmen

33. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals regarding future developments of the north-east licensed salmon fishery.

34. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement regarding the implications of the most recent southern T net order.

37. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received concerning the north-east licensed salmon fishery.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given earlier to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

Salmonella

36. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the results of action being taken by his Department to assist and encourage the eradication of salmonella from poultry flocks.

63. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the action which he is taking to combat salmonella infection in flocks of hens.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government have adopted a comprehensive range of measures to tackle the problem of salmonella in eggs and poultry.

Codes of practice have been introduced on the control of salmonella in laying flocks, breeding flocks, hatcheries, broilers and turkeys and guidelines issued on the control of salmonella in feedingstuffs.

Laying flocks and processed animal protein produced for use as feedingstuffs are statutorily subject to

compulsory bacteriological monitoring for the presence of salmonella. All identifications of the organism must be reported to my Department.

Notices have been served prohibiting the sale of eggs from flocks found to be contaminated with invasive salmonellas, such contaminated flocks have been compulsorily slaughtered, and compulsory cleansing of contaminated laying houses required.

Statutory powers have been exercised to prevent the movement of contaminated material from animal protein processing plants.

The laying controls on imported animal protein have been strengthened.

It is still too early to assess the results of these measures. Salmonella organisms are too pervasive for eradication to be possible but I am confident that the action which we are taking will have a significant effect in reducing the problem.

National Dairy Herd

38. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what proportion the size of the national dairy herd has declined in the last five years; and if the decline in each of the other member states of the European Community is greater or less than that in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage decline in dairy cow numbers in member states of the European community[1]
December 1983 to December 1988

	Per cent.
Denmark	22·7
France	22·6
Netherlands	20·6
Luxembourg	15·1
United Kingdom	13·2
Germany	12·2
Belgium	10·1
Ireland	9·7
Italy	7·0
Greece	1·9

Source: Eurostat.
[1] Figures for Spain and Portugal are not available.

NFU

39. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the president of the National Farmers Union; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. MacGregor: I meet the president of the National Farmers Union frequently to discuss agricultural matters.

Experimental Farms (Closure)

40. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and other organisations regarding the closure of Liscombe Hill experimental farm and Roswarne experimental station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary held a series of meetings with all interested parties in 1988 concerning our future research and development programme. The facilities required to undertake our R and D programme will form part of further consultations with industry organisations at official level with my noble Friend in May. In addition, my officials are pursuing with local interests those specific proposals that have been made for future funding of work at Liscombe and Rosewarne, bearing in mind the need to meet the full costs of the work retained.

Farm and Conservation Grants Scheme

41. **Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on reactions to his announcement of the farm and conservation grants scheme and the degree of interest being shown by farmers wanting to pursue it.

Mr. MacGregor: This scheme, which was introduced on 20 February, has received a generally very warm welcome from farming, conservation organisations and others.

Interest so far shown by farmers is high. In England 449 formal notifications have been received from farmers intending to begin pollution control work and 83 for the repair of traditional farm buildings. Fifty-six applications for farm improvement plans have also been received. In addition, divisional offices have dealt with a substantial number of inquiries about the scheme leading to a widescale distribution of the advisory literature.

This is a very encouraging response in the opening weeks of the new scheme. I am particularly pleased by the high level of interest in grants for waste disposal given the pressing need to reduce the incidence of farm pollution.

Agriculture Act 1947

42. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is considering amending any parts of the Agriculture Act 1947.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply he received on 16 February, at column *362*.

Chernobyl Fallout

44. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate how long restrictions will have to remain in force on farms affected by fall-out from Chernobyl.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 20 April 1989 to the hon. Members for Stretford, (Mr. Lloyd) and for Derbyshire, North (Mr. Barnes), at column 281.

Tied Cottages

45. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received recent representations from the National Farmers Union about tied cottages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: No.

Milk

47. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposal to ban the sale of unpasteurised milk in England and Wales.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have nothing to add to the reply my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on 23 February, at column *712-13*.

53. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what statistical evidence his Ministry currently has to show whether unpasteurised milk produced hygienically is damaging to human health.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The evidence is not so much statistical as scientific. Unpasteurised milk poses a threat to human health mainly because pathogens may be carried by an apparently healthy cow and passed on in its milk. The risk of such transmission is not significantly affected by production conditions.

Bovine Somatotropin

48. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from consumer and producer organisations about bovine somatotropin.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have received a number of representations from such organisations expressing a variety of views about BST.

Health and Hygiene Standards

49. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on steps to improve the health and hygiene standards in the agriculture and food industries.

Mr. Ryder: The Government attach the highest priority to ensuring food safety. Our policy has been and will remain to take such steps—in the form of prompt action coupled with advice to consumers—as are shown to be necessary. Recent examples of this include: a wide ranging set of measures dealing with salmonella in eggs and poultry and covering all stages of the food chain; guidance to the public on salmonella in eggs and on listeria; and the setting up of an independent expert committee to make recommendations on the microbiological safety of food. We shall shortly be launching an education campaign of food hygiene in the home.

We shall continue to act promptly on the findings of our extensive system of food surveillance and any other matters that come to light through scientific research and assessment.

Senor Carlos Romero Herrero

50. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met Senor Carlos Romero Herrero, President-in-Office, European Community Council of Fisheries Ministers; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food meets Senor Romero frequently in his capacity as President of the Council of Agriculture Ministers. I last met Senor Romero in La Toja, Spain on 10-11 April at an informal meeting of the EC Fisheries Ministers, where discussion ranged over a number of aspects of the common fisheries policy.

Farm Animal Welfare Council

52. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the Farm Animal Welfare Council; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I met representatives of the Farm Animal Welfare Council on 13 April and talked to them about space allowances for battery hens, the council's remit, and implementation of the FAWC reports on redmeat and religious slaughter.

Country Landowners Association

54. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the president of the Country Landowners Association; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. MacGregor: I last met the president of the Country Landowners Association on 15 February, when we discussed various matters relating to the tenanted sector. My noble friend has since met him on 17 April, when a wide range of agricultural issues were discussed.

Dairy Industry

55. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the present state of the dairy industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 5 April, at columns *214-15*.

57. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he is next due to meet the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board to discuss the dairy sector.

Mr. MacGregor: I have regular contacts with the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board to discuss various issues affecting the dairy industry.

Nature Conservancy Council

56. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Ryder: I met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council on 7 November last year, when we discussed a wide range of subjects.

Farm Woodlands Scheme

58. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate the progress being made with the farm woodlands scheme.

Mr. Ryder: Farmers have shown a very encouraging level of interest in the farm woodlands scheme. In the first six months of the scheme over 800 applications have been received to plant a total of 5,700 hectares (14,084 acres) of trees throughout the United Kingdom. A high proportion of the planting will be with broadleaved trees.

Council of Ministers

59. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last attended the EEC Council of Ministers; and what subjects were discussed.

62. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met Agriculture Ministers of the other European Economic Community member states; and what was discussed.

Mr. MacGregor: I last attended the EEC Council of Ministers on 17-21 April in Luxembourg, the outcome of which I reported to the House yesterday.

CAP

60. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the efficiency of safeguards against fraud in the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been pressing the Council and Commission for some time to take firmer action against fraud.

In Luxembourg last week I drew the attention of the Council to disturbing reports that ineligible butter had been bought in by intervention agencies, which demonstrated the need to take action to improve the controls on intervention. I received assurances from the Commission that it would report to the Council soon how it intended to follow-up recommendations made by the European Court of Auditors in its report on intervention.

I also emphasised the importance of considering the implication for fraud before proposals for new agricultural regulations were adopted by the Council, and of establishing in such regulations specific and cost effective control provisions which would minimise the risk of fraud. I noted that the Commission was reviewing existing regulations against these criteria and received assurances that they intended to improve the clarity and consistency of control provisions in all agriculture regulations.

Toxic Emissions

61. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made of the effect on farm animals of toxic emissions from industrial processes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In the past 10 years the state veterinary service has investigated 21 cases of toxicity thought to be caused by emissions from industrial processors. In eight of these, two involving cattle, two involving sheep and four various forms of wild life, chemical evidence was found. Seven were linked with contamination of water courses by fuel oils or chemical preservatives, and one with toxic emission from an incineration plant.

Animal Diseases

66. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on measures to prevent the importation of animal diseases after the establishment of the European internal market.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on measures to prevent the importation of animal diseases in the context of the development of the single European market.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Government will be aiming to secure the right balance between minimising barriers to trade and maintaining the effective veterinary controls necessary to prevent the introduction of disease.

Labour Statistics

64. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of full-time employees in the agriculture industry in 1979 and at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested on the number of full-time employees in agriculture in the United Kingdom is as follows:

	Number of workers (000's)
1979	187·0
1988	134·9

Source: June agricultural census.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

65. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review his policy concerning compensation for the slaughter of cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have no plans to do so. I have no evidence at all that farmers are cheating or trying to cheat.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state for each month of the current year the number of cattle identified as bovine spongiform encephalopathy-suspect by ante-mortem inspections at markets or slaughterhouses in the United Kingdom; and how many of these were subsequently confirmed as infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy by post-mortem inspection.

Mr. Donald Thompson: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing the cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy confirmed in each county of the United Kingdom for the four-week period ended 14 April.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 20 April at columns *282-83*, which covers the period in question.

Eggs

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals concerning the sale, to the general public, of eggs which have not been graded by an authorised packer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: In its report on salmonella in eggs, the Agriculture Select Committee drew particular attention to the fact that cracked eggs carried a greater risk of salmonella contamination; and that such eggs are often sold directly to consumers by the producer at the farm gate, door-to-door or in a public market. These direct sales by producers of their own production are not covered by the European Council regulations laying down standards for egg marketing.

Cracked eggs carry an increased risk of contamination because the cracks facilitate entry of bacteria into the inside of the egg, for example through contact with farmyard manure or dust, which may contain salmonella. The Government therefore propose to ban the retail sale by egg producers of eggs with cracks visible to the naked eye. We have today issued a consultation document seeking the view of interested organisations on this proposal and are seeking comments within two months.

I have placed a copy of the consultation document in the Library.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information is as follows:

[1]*(a)* My Department has 474 permanent staff employed in the office support grades.

[1]*(b)* There are 38 vacancies, four existed for over one month and 34 have existed for over three months.

[1]*(c)* There are 24 casual appointments.

[1]*(d)* During the period 1 September 1988—31 December 1988 office support grades employed in central London worked approximately 9,900 hours overtime; those outside central London worked approximately 1,700 hours overtime.

[1] As at 21 April 1989.

Slaughterhouses

Sir David Price: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make it his policy to ensure that by the end of 1991 all red meat slaughterhouses in the United Kingdom conform to EEC export standards.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The standards of hygiene and meat inspection required by our regulations for non-exporting plants are similar to those required for intra-Community trade. There are however different structural standards, and exporting plants are required to operate under veterinary supervision. Non-exporting plants are supervised by environmental health officers for whom we have high regard.

I shall be discussing with the EC Commission and other member states the rules which are to be adopted for all slaughterhouses on completion of the internal market. In those discussions I shall take account of views expresed to my by the interests concerned.

Apples, Cheese and Eggs

Mr. Adley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will issue a statement confirming that it is safe to eat apples, cheese and eggs.

Mr. Ryder: There is no need whatever for the public to stop eating apples, and similar advice, incidentally, has been issued by the United States authorities and confirmed by the United States surgeon general. Nor is there any reason for average healthy people to avoid eating either eggs or any kind of cheese—though we do advise everyone against eating raw eggs or uncooked food made from them. We have issued special warnings on lightly cooked eggs and soft-ripened cheese to pregnant women and other vulnerable groups. But I readily confirm the safety of these valuable foodstuffs for consumers generally.

Herpes

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make herpes in horses and any other animals a notifiable disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The herpes family of viruses causes a number of diseases. Aujeszky's disease, which is notifiable in pigs, cattle, sheep, goats, deer, horses, dogs and cats, is one of them. I have no plans to make any other a notifiable disease.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to visit Grimsby to discuss the fishing industry.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I visited Grimsby on 21 November 1988. I have no immediate plans for a further visit.

Lindane (Recovery)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what consultations are taking place between his officials and others regarding the retrieval of the container, containing five tonnes of organochlorine insecticide, Lindane, which was lost when the vessel Perintis foundered north-west of Guernsey on or about 13 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on Wednesday 19 April.

Cook-chill Food

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what recent representations he has received about the control of cook-chill foods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply he received from the Secretary of State for Health on 15 March 1989, at column *249*.

Mink and Fox Farming

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, whether he has received a copy of the press notice headed, "Farm Animal Welfare Council disapproves of mink and fox farming", dated 4 April; and whether he will make a statement on its recommendation that the state veterinary service should be required to effectively monitor standards of management on existing mink and fox farms by visiting them regularly.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have received a copy of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's statement on mink and fox farming. The state veterinary service already includes visits to fur farms as part of its monitoring of all types of livestock farms for welfare purposes. This monitoring will continue.

Food Poisoning (Research)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funding is allocated to basic and technological research into food poisoning at universities and food research associations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: In 1988-89 the estimated funding by my Department of food R and D at universities and food research associations relating to food poisoning, was £445,000. The programme for 1989-90 is still being negotiated.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science also makes funds available to the Agricultural and Food Research Council and universities for basic and strategic scientific research. It is up to the institutions themselves to allocate the resources made available to them. Some will be spent on research into food poisoning.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many days supply of *(a)* milk, *(b)* butter, *(c)* meat and *(d)* grain are currently in store in Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding reply 26 April 1989]*: Estimated days supply, in store in the United Kingdom, are as follows:

Commodity	*Days supply*
Milk[1]	0
Butter[2]	26
Lamb[3]	21
Beef[2]	11
Pork	3
Ham and Bacon	10-14
Wheat and Barley[2]	20

[1] Raw milk is stored only for very brief periods prior to packaging or processing.

[2] Intervention and EC assisted private storage only. Information on the quantities in commercial storage is unavailable.

[3] Frozen imported lamb.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 28 April 1989

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Offences Against the Person

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if any instructions have been given to the Crown Prosecution Service on the prosecution of persons formally charged under section 47 of the Offences Against the Person Act.

The Attorney-General: No specific instructions concerning the prosecution of offences under section 47 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 have been issued to the Crown Prosecution Service as a whole. However, some chief Crown prosecutors have issued guidance to Crown prosecutors in their area.

As with all cases prosecuted by the service, in accordance with the code for Crown prosecutors, Crown prosecutors are required to satisfy themselves that there is sufficient evidence to afford a realistic prospect of conviction, and, if there is, whether the public interest requires a prosecution, before continuing criminal proceedings for such offences.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Attendance Rates

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give for the latest year for which figures are available the school attendance rate for *(a)* the years one to five secondary school, *(b)* fourth year secondary pupils, *(c)* fifth year secondary pupils and *(d)* primary schools for each local education authority.

Mr. Butcher: This information is not collected centrally. The monitoring of school attendance and decisions on whether to publish figures on attendance are matters for local education authorities and schools.

British School, Armenia

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when work will be started on the British school in Armenia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government set aside £5 million for Armenian relief and reconstruction shortly after last December's earthquake. Two million pounds of this has been allocated to a project to build, furnish and equip a school in Leninaken. Aid Armenia and a number of major British firms are also contributing to the project. Work will start shortly and my Department is planning to complete the school before the beginning of the 1990-91 school year. Parliamentary approval to provision for this school will be sought in the 1989-90 Supply Estimate for the schools, research and miscellaneous services Vote. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £1·5 million will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Teachers Pay and Conditions

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has now considered the views expressed by the local authority employees, teachers unions and others on his proposals following the second report of the Interim Advisory Committee on Schoolteachers Pay and Conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer my hon. Friend to the pursuant reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 27 April 1989.

Teacher Training

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many places he is making available for intakes to initial teacher training in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have decided to make available 23,172 places for intakes to initial teacher training courses in England and Wales in the academic year 1990-91, an increase of over 9 per cent. over the 1989 target of 21,157.

Four hundred and fifty of these additional places will be set aside for the development of innovative forms of secondary phase training in chemistry, music and modern languages. Initial teacher training institutions in the university and English PCFC sectors will be invited to bid for these places shortly.

I have also decided on the provisional allocations of intake numbers to individual courses at institutions in the English public sector. The Secretary of State for Wales will be seeking advice from the Wales advisory body on the allocation of places to the public sector initial teacher training institutions in Wales. I am writing today to the chairman of the Universities Funding Council to invite the council to consider the allocation of places in the university sector in England and Wales.

I am placing details of my proposals in the Library.

DEFENCE

Support Grades

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Sainsbury: As at 24 April 1989 a total of 2,963 office support grades (messengers, paperkeepers, office keepers, security guards, reprographic grades and Government telephonists) were employed within the Ministry of Defence.

During the period 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989, the number of temporary and casual appointees was 51 and the amount of overtime worked by these temporary and casual appointees was:

(a) London—304·5 hours.
(b) Elsewhere—1,019·5 hours.

The office support grades are employed in Ministry of Defence establishments throughout the United Kingdom

and are recruited locally under delegated authority. Therefore, information about vacancies could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Arms Exports (Jobs)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs were directly and indirectly supported by arms exports in *(a)* 1986, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* 1988.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988 (Cm. 344-11, vol. 2, table 618).

Lunch-time Supervision

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects teachers employed by the Service Children's Education Authority to be paid the back money due to them in respect of lunch-time supervision duties.

Mr. Neubert: Further to my reply of 20 February, at column *445*, those teachers involved in lunch-time supervisory duties prior to 1 December 1988 have now completed claims for the hours worked and the individual calculations of moneys due have been completed. Payment is imminent.

Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the summary of proposed steps for improving recruitment and retention in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said in reply to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) on 24 February, at column *847*, that we were considering the report on manning and recruiting in the Army in the nineties (MARILYN) and that in due course we should be in a position to publish a summary of the steps we would be taking to improve recruitment and retention. That remains our intention and naturally such a document would be made available to the House.

Safety-related Software

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation he has had to ensure the requirements of Def Stan 00-55 do not conflict with the impending international standard.

Mr. Sainsbury: My officials have been, and will continue to be, in consultation with the United Kingdom's representatives on the International Electrotechnical Commission's working group which is developing the international standard for software for computers in the application of industrial safety-related systems. The consultation is aimed at maximising the commonality between this standard and Def Stan 00-55.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why his Department is developing its own standard of safety-related software independent of moves to introduce an international standard for civilian industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is Ministry of Defency policy to use existing international standards, where applicable, in preference to European, national and defence standards. However, the lack of an adequate existing standard for safety-related software in defence equipment meant that it was essential for us to commence development of Def Stan 00-55. We are, though, taking account of the work, begun subsequently, of the International Electrotechnical Commission on an international standard for safety-related software for civilian industry.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his intention that industry shall be bound by both *(a)* the impending standard on safety-related software coming from the International Electrotechnical Commission and *(b)* defence standard 00-55.

Mr. Sainsbury: The draft defence standard 00-55 covering the use of software in safety critical applications in defence equipment has yet to be issued for consultation. The extent to which that standard, and other related standards, will be applied in defence contracts will be resolved as part of the consultation process.

Type 23 Frigates

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to invite tenders for further type 23 frigates.

Mr. Sainsbury: Competitive tenders are being sought today for up to four Duke class type 23 frigates from the four United Kingdom shipbuilders with the appropriate capabilities—Yarrow Shipbuilders Ltd., Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd., Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Ltd. and the VSEL/Cammell Laird group.

Tenderers will be required to submit fixed-price bids for varying combinations of up to four ships based on a phased build programme. Decisions will be taken on the precise timing and number to be ordered after the tenders have been received, evaluated and fully analysed.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq (Executions)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation Her Majesty's Government are making to the Iraqi Government about the unknown number of executions of young people under the age of 18, in the light of the minimum age limit of 18 for a death sentence to be imposed under international law.

Mrs. Chalker: We have repeatedly made clear to the Iraqi authorities our concern at the abuses of human rights in Iraq. Both the United Kingdom and Iraq have ratified the international covenant on civil and political rights which prohibits the use of the death penalty against minors. The Iraqis know that we expect them to abide by their international obligations.

Vietnam

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long are current waiting periods experienced by new asylum seekers from Vietnam between arrival in Hong Kong and screening by immigration officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Asylum seekers arriving in Hong Kong from Vietnam since 16 June 1988 have been subject to

screening in accordance with UNHCR criteria. The Hong Kong immigration department is currently screening those who arrived during July 1988. The screening and appeals process started off slowly because the procedures were new and complex, but we expect it to speed up as it becomes more established. Given the size of the problem and the increased rate of new arrivals, the Hong Kong immigration department, in consultation with UNHCR, has been reviewing its screening and appeals procedures with a view to shortening the waiting period.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list what is involved in the offset programme in relation to the Tornado deal with Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Al Yamamah economic offset programme arises from and is associated with project Al Yamamah, the sale of Tornado and other equipment to the Government of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, the offset programme is aimed at encouraging and assisting the creation of viable and profitable joint and other commercial ventures in any sector between United Kingdom and Saudi Arabian companies. It is a broadly based and flexible programme designed to provide the maximum benefit to the economies of both countries, and is open to all United Kingdom companies, not just defence contractors. Detailed arrangements for the programme were finalised between the Government and the Saudi Government at the end of last year, and the programme was formally launched to United Kingdom industry at a British seminar held in London on 31 January 1989.

The British offset office established within my Department has responsibility in the United Kingdom for implementing and managing this programme and it is working closely both with other Government Departments and with the many companies who have expressed interest in developing project ideas under the initiative. It is hoped that the first venture proposals will be ready for discussion with the Saudi Government offset committee very shortly. Because of the commercial confidentiality of the market opportunities under consideration, and respecting companies' wishes in this matter, we cannot at this stage give details of the business proposals under consideration.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement about the level of aid to Zimbabwe.

Mr. Chris Patten: We have provided over £200 million in development assistance for Zimbabwe since independence and we intend to maintain a substantial programme. On her recent visit my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pledged a further £10 million in capital aid for Zimbabwe, in addition to the £15 million that she offered to President Mugabe last October.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Reduction

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research is currently under way into waste reduction technology.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Research is under way at Warren Spring laboratory to process domestic refuse mechanically to recover materials, energy and compost and thus reduce the volume of wate for disposal in landfill sites. Warren Spring laboratory is also studying the preprocessing of refuse prior to incineration.

Numerous methods, both end of pipe and clean technologies, have been developed by industry in the United Kingdom for removal of heavy metals and the destruction of toxic components from process waste streams. However, the Department does not hold centrally details of all research and development projects currently being undertaken in the public and private sectors.

Water and Sewerage Companies

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what work is being undertaken by or on behalf of his Department to consider the implications of a proportion of water and sewerage companies remaining in Government ownership.

Mr. Ridley: None.

Hillsborough Disaster

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the Government contribution to the Hillsborough disaster fund will be financed.

Mr. Moynihan: A supplementary estimate on the central environmental services Vote (class X vote 2) will be presented in due course to cover the urgent expenditure on this new service. Pending parliamentary approval of this supplementary estimate, the Government's contribution of £500,000 to the Hillsborough disaster appeal will be met by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund. Subject to parliamentary approval of the supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Vote will be increased by £500,000 from £279,923,000 to £280,423,000. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Beaches (Pollution)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library, the detailed coliform and E. coli results of all samples collected in the summer of 1988 for each of the 380 beaches summarised in deposited document NS 4754.

Mr. Howard: Such detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Details of all samples are recorded on the public register maintained by each water authority.

Bradford (Development)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether grant application has been made by

the Yorkshire water authority for the rebuilding of Bradford Beck and a comprehensive flood alleviation scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Bradford city council and the Yorkshire water authority have submitted a draft joint application for European regional development fund grant for the combined Bradford Beck flood alleviation scheme and phase 1a of the Bradford Beck sewage strategy. The works are included in the Bradford integrated development operation (IDO).

Once a full application has been received it will be considered by the IDO co-ordinating committee who will assess the scheme's compatibility with the strategy and objectives of the programme.

River Mersey (Pollution)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to stop excessive discharges of pollution into the River Mersey.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, dischargers must apply to the appropriate regulatory authority—currently regional water authorities or Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution—before discharging into controlled waters. Consents are usually subject to specified conditions, the purpose of which is to protect the environmental quality objectives of the receiving waters.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning announced on 7 December 1988, at column *199*, an accelerated programme of about £1,000 million for all water authorities to bring sub-standard sewage treatment works into compliance with their discharge consents by March 1992.

In addition, the Mersey basin campaign involves the construction of new sewage treatment and disposal facilities and the provision of major new interceptor sewers to take industrial trade and sewage effluents which are currently discharged directly into the river. The programme, which will cost around £2·5 billion over 25 years, will bring the Mersey up to class 2 (fair quality) throughout its length.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will cease to exempt Unilever on the Mersey from the provisions of the Control of Pollution Act;

(2) whether he will now require Granox to comply with the Control of Pollution Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 20 April 1989]:* The provisions of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 apply to all companies.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled Workers (British Coal)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to what percentage of the work force employed by British Coal are registered disabled.

Mr. Lee: As at 1 June 1987, 0·6 per cent. of the work force of British Coal were registered as disabled, as published in the *Employment Gazette* in February 1988. Figures for 1988 will be published shortly.

Workers (Rights)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what reviews he is undertaking to implement the European Economic Community directive giving part-time workers the same legal rights as full-time workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: This draft directive has not yet been approved by the Council of Ministers. At its meeting in June 1985 the Council agreed to defer further discussion. I understand that little progress has been made since then.

TRANSPORT

Air Fares

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's policy on European air fares after the decision of the European Court in the case of Ahmed Saeed Flugreisen and Another *v.* Zentrale Zur Bekampfung Unlauteren Wettbewerbs E.V.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Our policy objective is to ensure that air travellers are charged fair prices; this conforms with the judgment of the European Court. We are reviewing the arrangements by which this objective is achieved to ensure that they are in accordance with the court decision.

Fawley Power Station

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on the application by the Central Electricity Generating Board to build a coal jetty and related works at Fawley.

Mr. Portillo: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy informed my hon. Friend on 27 October 1988, at column *320*, in view of the board's decision not to pursue for the time being its application for consent to build a generating station at Fawley the Government decided that the board's associated application for an order empowering the building of a jetty and other harbour works should not proceed further. There is therefore no extant application under the Harbours Act. The board recently announced the withdrawal of its application for the generating station.

Travel (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many people travelling into central London by car receive *(a)* a free parking space and *(b)* a subsidised parking space from their employers;

(2) what is the total cash assistance provided by employers to employees in central London for travelling by *(a)* car and *(b)* public transport;

(3) how many people travel each day into central London by cars which are *(a)* owned by their employers or *(b)* subsidised by their employers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We do not have that information.

The Department has commissioned research to examine the nature and scale of company assistance with travel costs to employees in the London area.

Underground Railways (Safety)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what correspondence or consultation has taken place between his railway inspectorate and British Railways Board concerning proposals to withdraw guards on trains running in single line tunnels between Finsbury Park and Moorgate; and if he will place copies of such correspondence in the Library.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* There has been a thorough consultation between British Rail and the railway inspectorate about the possible introduction of driver-only operation on this line, though I understand that British Rail has no immediate plans to withdraw guards. The inspectorate has assured me that it is satisfied with operational arrangements. I see no need to place copies of its correspondence with British Rail in the Library.

West Sussex (Investment)

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for future investment on roads and rail in west Sussex.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* It is for British Rail to come forward with investment proposals based on its own assessment of priorities. I am always happy to approve worthwhile investment and I would consider carefully any plans to improve rail services in west Sussex.

As regards investment in roads, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to him on 13 February 1989.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Support Grade Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Forth: In this answer, the term "support grades" has been interpreted as the grades support manager 1 to 3 and support grades band 1 to 2:

(a) On 1 April 1989 there were 936 staff in post excluding casual staff (part-time staff are counted as half).

(b) On 1 April 1989 there were 57·5 vacant posts compared with 62 vacant posts on 1 March 1989 and 40 vacant posts on 1 January 1989. These figures reflect the difference between staff in post (including casuals) and authorised posts at each date.

Information on the duration of individual vacancies could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(c) On 1 April 1989 there were 31 casual staff in post (part-time staff being counted as half).

(d) In 1988-89 approximately 76,850 hours overtime were worked in the DTI by support grades. The Department does not keep its overtime records in a form which makes it possible to split overtime worked in London from overtime worked outside London.

Computers

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he proposes to make a response to the Law Commission's working paper No. 110 on computer misuse; whether he will make it public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I have no plans to make a formal response.

Information Technology

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what non-formal representations he has received on his response to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry's report into information technology.

Mr. Forth: I have received no non-formal representations on this response.

Companies (South African Subsidiaries)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the names of United Kingdom registered companies which have broken the EEC code of conduct in respect of their South African subsidiaries; and if he will forward such a list to the European Commission.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department's analysis and summary of company reports submitted in accordance with the EC code of conduct was placed in the Library of each House last month. It has also been made available to officials in Europe.

Guarantees

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received any complaints concerning the guarantees provided by companies with their products; what steps he has taken to assess whether it is possible for consumers to distinguish between a good guarantee and a worthless one; if he proposes to bring foward proposals to require any changes to the guarantees provided by companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Only a small proportion of the consumer problems raised with my Department are concerned with guarantees. The National Consumer Council recently published a consultative document on some aspects of the use of guarantees; any recommendations resulting from the NCC consultation will be carefully considered. The subject of guarantees generally has been examined, and remains under review, by the Office of Fair Trading. The Director General of Fair Trading's report entitled "Consumer Guarantees", published in June 1986 makes recommendations aimed at industry and offers good advice to consumers. The Government have no present plans to legislate.

Girobank

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the future of Girobank's corporate lending and leasing business in the event of its being sold to a building society.

Mr. Forth: Under the Building Societies Act 1986, as amended, building societies are not permitted to undertake leasing business or make unsecured loans to corporate bodies. Arrangements would therefore need to be made for Girobank's leasing and corporate lending business to be removed from its balance sheet before it could be purchased by a buidling society. Such arrangements would be a matter for negotiation between the Post Office and the building society concerned in the first instance. The arrangements would need to satisfy the regulatory authorities.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what weight he gave to the net asset value of Girobank and to the current year's retained earnings in considering the Alliance and Leicester's £130 million bid for Girobank.

Mr. Forth: As the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced on 20 April, at column *260*, we are satisfied that the Post Office Board's decision to accept the conditional offer made by Alliance and Leicester Building Society to purchase Girobank takes full account of the factors, of which price was one, which we announced would be taken into account in evaluating bids.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fax Charges

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received from hon. Members seeking a reduction in the charge made by the Post Office in the Palace of Westminster of £5·80 to hon. Members for transmitting one page of A4 by fax to a London address.

Mr. Wakeham: I have received no representations about the cost of the service provided by the Post Office since the matter was last considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee in May 1988. The charge made by the Post Office in the Palace of Westminster for its facsimile (Intelpost) transmission service reflects the tariff in use throughout the country. For parliamentary business, right hon. and hon. Members may purchase fascimile machines for their personal use from their office costs allowance.

WALES

ESA Payments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the extension of the ESA payment eligibility to farms within national parks in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Six representations have been received on behalf of farmers in the national parks in Wales for the extension of the ESA scheme to their land. I shall give careful consideration to these requests if and when further ESA designations are in prospect.

NHS Reform

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has as to the likely change in the level of rural general practitioner's remuneration as a result of the introduction of the new contract for general practitioners.

Mr. Grist: The Government's proposals for linking family doctors' pay more closely to the range and quality of their resources to patients are set out in the report "General Practice in the National Health Service—A New Contract", and appendix F provides illustrative assessments of the effects on different types of practice. The implications for rural practice are fully considered in that report, copies of which were sent to all GMPs. The proposals include a rural areas supplement to the basic practice allowance which is designed to recognise the particular nature of practice in sparsely populated rural areas and to ensure that GMPs practising in such areas are not unduly disadvantaged by the nature of the area in which they work.

Hospital Operations

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to the costs of the 10 most common operations in each Welsh hospital.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not available centrally.

Post-16 Education

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for the latest available year the post-16 staying on rate for each Welsh local education authority.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The percentage of 16 and 17-year-olds staying on in full-time education at schools, tertiary and colleges of further education for the academic year 1987-88 is shown in the following table:

	[1] *16-year-olds*	[2] *17-year-olds*
Clwyd	47	31
Dyfed	54	40
Gwent	47	31
Gwynedd	52	37
Mid Glamorgan	47	31
Powys	55	36
South Glamorgan	51	33
West Glamorgan	52	34
Wales	50	33

[1] As a percentage of 15-year-old pupils in schools in the academic year 1986-87.

[2] As a percentage of 15-year-old pupils in schools in the academic year 1985-86.

School Attendance Rates

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for the latest year for which figures are available the school attendance rate for *(a)* the years one to five secondary school, *(b)* fourth-year secondary pupils, *(c)* fifth-year secondary pupils and *(d)* primary schools for each Welsh local education authority.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information in the form requested is not collected centrally. However, data in respect of primary and secondary school attendance as a whole on a census day in September 1988 are as follows:

Percentage of pupils on role in attendance

	Secondary	*Primary*
Clwyd	91	88
Dyfed	90	90
Gwent	90	89
Gwynedd	90	92

	Secondary	Primary
Mid Glamorgan	85	89
Powys	92	94
South Glamorgan	88	88
West Glamorgan	86	84

General Practitioners (Remuneration)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average remuneration per general practitioner in *(a)* each family practitioner committee area, *(b)* urban areas, *(c)* rural areas and *(d)* Wales as a whole.

Mr. Grist: The information is not readily available centrally. The review body on doctors and dentists' remuneration recommends the level of general medical practitioners' income. In 1989-90 the average gross income of GMPs in the United Kingdom is intended to be £60,000. This figure reflects the review body's recommendation in respect of GMPs' net income and indirectly reimbursed expenses which the Government have accepted in full, plus estimated directly reimbursed expenses. The recommended average net income is £31,105.

Try-butyl-tin

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what tests have been conducted in the Milford Haven and the river Cleddau to ascertain pollution caused by Try-butyl-tin (TBT); and what were the results.

Mr. Grist: This is a matter for the Welsh water authority and the information is not held by the Welsh Office.

HEALTH

NHS (Reform)

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many permanent consultant posts, inclusive of the addition of 100 in the White Paper proposals, he estimates will be in place by the late 1990s; what is the estimated cost of this programme; how the cost of additional consultants is shown in forward National Health Service spending plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The projections prepared for "Hospital Medical Staffing—Achieving a Balance—Plan for Action" published in October 1987 suggested that the number of consultants in England and Wales in 1998 would be 19,473. The 100 new consultants announced in "Working for Patients" are not included in this figure.

Expenditure on consultants is not separately identified in NHS spending plans.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with respect to the support grades in his Department *(a)* what is the number of staff employed, *(b)* how many vacancies there are and how many of these have existed for over one month and over three months, *(c)* how many temporary and casual appointments there are and *(d)* how much overtime was worked by them in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Mellor: The figures are:

	Figures
(a) The number of staff employed	325
(b) The number of vacancies:	
i. currently	9
ii. that have existed for over one month	8
iii. that have existed for over three months	3
(c) The number of casual appointments at present	28
The number of limited period appointments currently	8
(d) The amount of overtime worked by them during March 1989, all within the London pay area	2,518·5 hours

Population Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Caernarfon of 18 April, *Official Report*, column *122*, if he will analyse the total population growth by standard region between 1990 and 2000 for people *(a)* over 75 years of age and *(b)* over 85 years of age, as between (i) the growth caused by projections of existing population and (ii) the change caused by net movements of population.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is in the table.

Change in population between 1990 and 2000 by Standard Region

Thousands

		Total	(1)	(2)
North	75 and over	28·4	25·0	3·4
	85 and over	15·5	14·8	0·7
Yorkshire and Humberside	75 and over	26·1	29·7	−3·6
	85 and over	23·7	24·8	−1·1
East Midlands	75 and over	39·0	35·0	4·0
	85 and over	23·1	22·1	0·9
East Anglia	75 and over	28·3	16·6	11·6
	85 and over	17·5	14·3	3·2
South East	75 and over	97·5	123·0	−25·6
	85 and over	93·5	100·7	−7·1
Greater London	75 and over	−14·2	37·1	−51·3
	85 and over	24·6	39·5	−14·9
Rest of South East	75 and over	111·7	85·9	25·7
	85 and over	69·0	61·2	7·8
South West	75 and over	46·7	26·6	20·1
	85 and over	38·6	32·5	6·1
West Midlands	75 and over	49·6	54·9	−5·3
	85 and over	26·6	28·1	−1·5
North West	75 and over	21·5	26·7	−5·2

		Total	*(1)*	*(2)*
Wales	85 and over	27·6	29·0	−1·4
	75 and over	29·5	30·4	−0·9
	85 and over	16·0	16·1	−0·1

Figures may not add due to rounding.
(1) The change caused by projections of existing population.
(2) The change caused by net movement of population.

Dental Services

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what current channels of communication he uses to keep in touch with opinion among practising dentists in the general dental service in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor: Apart from the Department's standing dental advisory committee, the Department's chief dental officer, who is a member of the General Dental Council keeps, in close touch with the academic and professional leaders of the dental profession. Officials maintain close relations with the officers and senior officials of the British Dental Association and negotiate with the general dental services committee which represents all general dental practitioners.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Handicapped People (Claims)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what information his Department makes available to people who are mentally handicapped and their families about any benefits that they may be entitled to;

(2) if he intends to make any special efforts to ensure that people who are mentally handicapped receive all the benefits that they are entitled to;

(3) if mentally handicapped persons who claim severe disablement allowance are automatically advised of the possibility that they may be entitled to claim income support.

Mr. Scott: People who are mentally handicapped qualify for benefits under the same criteria as people suffering from other disabilities so the same steps are taken to help them, and those who are acting for them, to claim the benefits to which they may be entitled. Information about these benefits is available in a range of leaflets from Social Security offices, and the freeline telephone inquiry service.

The leaflet about severe disablement allowance, which includes the claim form, draws attention to the possibility of claiming income support. Additionally, all young people, under age 18, who claim the allowance are issued with a leaflet about income support, and an explanation of how to claim it, unless it is clear that they have already done so.

Transitional Payments

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in receipt of benefit were entitled to transitional payments in 1988; and how many in the current year in *(a)* Huddersfield and *(b)* Dewsbury.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 6 March at column *445*.

Disabled People (Charity Advertising)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will draw up a code of practice to regulate charity advertising about disabled people.

Mr. Scott: There are no present plans to draw up such a code of practice.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Road Drainage (Claim)

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims regarding road drainage have been made against *(a)* Belfast divisional roads service and *(b)* Ballymena divisional roads service during the last three financial years; and how many of these claims were (i) decided by the courts and (ii) settled out of court.

Mr. Needham: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sheep

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of maedi-visna disease in sheep have been recorded by the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland, in each of the years from 1980 to 1988, in each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: There have been no clinical cases of maedi-visna disease in sheep recorded in each of the years from 1980 to 1988 in any of the Parliamentary constituencies of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are being taken to ensure that all sheep imported into Northern Ireland are tested for maedi-visna disease.

Mr. Viggers: Sheep may be imported into Northern Ireland only if they meet stringent licensing conditions. These conditions require resting for maedi-visna disease in pre-import and post-import isolation, except where the sheep come from fully accredited maedi-visna-free flocks in the country of origin.

There are no maedi-visna testing requirements for sheep from the Republic of Ireland which, like Northern Ireland, is regarded as maedi-visna free.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of sheep imported into Northern Ireland in each of the years since 1980; and what were the individual breeds.

Mr. Viggers: The information is as follows:

	Number
1980	88,014
1981	105,314
1982	42,863
1983	41,403
1984	58,971
1985	67,274
1986	57,249
1987	77,175
1988	55,535

The records available do not indicate the individual breeds.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sheep were quarantined in Northern Ireland in each of the years since 1980.

Mr. Viggers: The information is as follows:

	Number
1980	531
1981	440
1983	500
1984	400
1985	341
1986	66
1987	170
1988	196

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many flocks of sheep in Northern Ireland have been maedi-visna tested.

Mr. Viggers: A total of 418 flocks of sheep in Northern Ireland have been maedi-visna tested. These are flocks which joined the voluntary Northern Ireland maedi-visna register of accredited flocks.

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Scheme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount, in grants, paid out by the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland, under the agriculture and horticulture development scheme in each of the years since 1980, to applicants from each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. It has been given, however, by county.

Year	*Antrim*	*Armagh*	*Down*	*Fermanagh*	*Londonderry*	*Tyrone*	*Total*
1980	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1981	—	—	13,173	2,241	7,226	1,466	24,106
1982	20,553	23,743	38,656	101,771	46,968	151,280	382,971
1983	134,863	196,344	197,546	386,516	198,696	333,162	1,447,127
1984	261,115	366,192	203,254	782,518	327,484	838,121	2,778,684
1985	356,332	677,989	353,037	1,076,299	488,054	1,433,728	4,385,439
1986	1,010,000	1,386,458	707,924	1,882,423	863,477	3,335,010	9,185,292
1987	1,220,903	2,158,513	459,335	2,105,015	963,866	3,782,671	10,690,303
[1]1988	420,719	1,344,994	270,874	1,263,507	501,118	2,132,351	5,933,563

[1] Three quarters only.

Agricultural Development Programme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount, in grants, paid out by the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland, under the Northern Ireland agricultural development programme, in each of the years since 1982, to applicants from each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. It has been given by county.

Northern Ireland ADP expenditure 1982-83 to 1988-89

£ million

Counties	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*Total*
Antrim	4·978	3·241	3·088	1·926	1·390	0·585	0·242	15·45
Armagh	1·063	1·110	1·585	1·304	0·817	0·961	0·357	7·197
Down	0·272	0·441	0·481	0·484	0·417	0·362	0·071	2·528
Fermanagh	12·040	10·107	12·215	5·760	3·299	1·475	0·226	45·122
Londonderry	3·614	2·077	2·292	1·210	0·794	0·543	0·190	10·72
Tyrone	6·536	4·658	7·074	2·952	2·391	0·980	0·465	25·056
	28·503	21·634	26·735	13·636	9·108	4·906	1·551	106·073

Diversification Grant Scheme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount, in grants, paid out by the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland, under the farm diversification grant scheme in each of the years since 1980 to applicants from each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The farm diversification grant scheme was introduced on 1 January 1988. In 1988 there was one payment which amounted to £5,391·52 in county Antrim.

Grassland Scheme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount, in grants, paid out by the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland, under the grassland scheme (N.I.) in each of the years since 1987 to applicants from each of the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. It has been given by county.

Counties	Grant 1987-88	Grant 1988-89
Antrim	130,714	11,480
Armagh	89,249	8,716
Down	117,247	25,718
Fermanagh	70,927	1,106
Londonderry	135,925	7,132
Tyrone	284,272	12,347
Total	828,334	66,499

Bridging Allowance

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people completed their eight-week eligibility period for bridging allowance during March 1989.

Mr. Viggers: Information concerning bridging allowance recipients is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people exhausted their eight-week bridging allowance payment during October 1988, November 1988, December 1988, January 1989, February 1989 and March 1989.

Mr. Viggers: Information concerning bridging allowance recipients is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

YTS

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many YTS places remained unfilled at the end of September 1988, October 1988, November 1988, December 1988, January 1989, February 1989 and March 1989.

Mr. Viggers: The Northern Ireland equivalent of YTS is the youth training programme (YTP). The number of training places unfilled in each month is as follows:

	Number
September 1988	1,024
October 1988	796
November 1988	887
December 1988	912
January 1989	1,201
February 1989	1,436
March 1989	2,078

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were on YTS schemes at the end of September 1988, October 1988, November 1988, December 1988, January 1989, February 1989 and March 1989.

Mr. Viggers: The number of participants in the youth training programme in each month is as follows:

	Number
September 1988	14,596
October 1988	14,562
November 1988	14,306
December 1988	13,255
January 1989	12,585
February 1989	11,995
March 1989	11,418

HOME DEPARTMENT

Notifiable Offences (Mansfield)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish current figures for notifiable offences recorded by the police in the Mansfield area, by offence, showing the percentage change over the most convenient period.

Mr. John Patten: The information readily available to the Home Office is for recorded crime in the Nottinghamshire police force area in 1988 and was published in Home Office statistical bulletin 7/89 on 16 March 1989 (Table 8 shows changes over 1987 by offence group for each police force area.) More detailed information, for areas within Nottinghamshire such as Mansfield, will be published later in the year in the report of the chief constable for Nottinghamshire. Copies of these publications will be available in the Library.

Hillsborough Disaster

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will meet the costs accruing to the West Midlands police authority of the participation of West Midlands police officers in the investigation of the Hillsborough disaster, and of arranging policing cover in the West Midlands as a result of these duties.

Mr. Hurd: As I said in a letter which I sent to my hon. Friend yesterday, no additional costs will be borne by the West Midlands police authority. "Additional costs" include the cost of overtime worked by the west midlands police officers in their own force area to cover duties which would otherwise have been undertaken by officers seconded to the Hillsborough inquiry. The means of reimbursing the West Midlands police authority will be for further consideration.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last three years on charges arising from the misuse of alphachloralose.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This information is not available centrally.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the officers of his Department in each grade from 1 to 7 are *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities; and what proportion each such figure represents of the total numbers of officers at that grade.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: According to the latest available figures, in the unified grades 1 to 7 there are two women at grade 3, 15 at grade 5, three at grade 6 and 73 at grade 7. The proportions in each grade were provided in my earlier reply of 20 April. There are in addition 33 women in grades equivalent to grades 1 to 7.

In the unified grades nine members of staff in grades 6 and 7 described themselves as of ethnic minority origin. This represents 2 per cent. of respondents to staff surveys in these grades. Twenty-seven senior medical offices and

medical officers who are in grades equivalent to grades 5 and 6 described themselves as of ethnic minority origin. This represents 30 per cent. of respondents in these grades.

Personal Identity Numbers

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to bring forward proposals whereby all individuals would have a personal identity number; and what representations he has received on the matter.

Mr. John Patten: We have no such plan and have received no such representations.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Debt

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if all repayments of debt arising from his recent Budget decisions have now been made.

Mr. Lilley: No.

Trade Deficit

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the balance of trade deficit in the current year.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) on 19 April at column *168*.

Investment Capital (Annual Return)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the estimated annual return on investment capital for each year since 1970.

Mr. Major: The information requested is as follows:

Net real rate of return[1] for non-North sea industrial and commercial companies

	(per cent.)
1970	8·9
1971	9·2
1972	9·5
1973	8·9
1974	5·3
1975	4·2
1976	4·3
1977	6·7
1978	7·1
1979	5·6
1980	3·8
1981	2·8
1982	4·0
1983	4·9
1984	5·6
1985	7·2
1986	8·9
1987	10·2

[1] Net operating surplus on United Kingdom operations as a percentage of net capital stock of fixed assets before investment and tax at current replacement cost.

Source: Department of Trade and Industry: published in "British Business" on 30 September 1988.

Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on all recorded cases of unauthorised access to the computer files of *(a)* the Treasury and *(b)* the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* It is not the policy of the Treasury or the Inland Revenue to make public details and circumstances of computer security incidents, their perpetrators and their success or failure, since such information might be of assistance to potential attackers.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will give details of his Department's policy on review of the security of Treasury and Inland Revenue computer files;

(2) if he can quantify the risk of damage by hackers to sensitive computerised files in the Treasury and Inland Revenue;

(3) what measures *(a)* the Tresury and *(b)* the Inland Revenue have taken to protect data in transit by electronic means.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* The Treasury and the Inland Revenue take advice from the appropriate Government authorities on security matters. In the case of unclassified but sensitive data this includes the CCTA IT security and privacy group (part of Her Majesty's Treasury) which is the central Government advisory authority in this area. It would not be sensible to publish details of actual counter-measures, reviews and risks.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether staff of the Treasury and Inland Revenue, respectively, are briefed about computer hacking and computer viruses; whether there are contingency plans to deal with computer downtime caused by unauthorised penetration; and whether plans exist to deal with penetration of particularly sensitive systems.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* The Treasury and Inland Revenue have contingency plans and staff eduction programmes as part of their wider information systems strategy, but their effectiveness would be reduced if details were made public.

Petrol Prices

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional revenue yield from the recent rises in petrol prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 24 April 1989]:* I regret that it is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the change in the revenue yield from recent petrol price rises.

EC Finance Ministers

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met Finance Ministers of the other European Economic Community member states; and what was discussed.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) on 21 April 1989.

EC (Economic and Monetary Union)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards economic and monetary union within the European Economic Community.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 April 1989]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) on 21 April at column *327* and to the exchange between my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) on 18 April at column 181.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking the removal of value added tax zero rating on goods and clothes sold in charity shops.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 27 April 1989]:* None.

Government Departments (Dispersal)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about moving Government Departments to the north-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 27 April 1989]:* I have received a number of letters supporting the relocation of Government Departments to the north-west, including two from my hon. Friend. With regard to a statement, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on 9 February 1989 at columns *751-52.*

SCOTLAND

EC Assistance

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total amounts of European regional development fund moneys allocated to Scotland in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1983 to 1988, inclusive.

Mr. Lang: Awards of £94·9 million were secured in 1988. For the six years 1983 to 1988 total awards of £527·6 million were made.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the geographical areas or functions in Scotland which are currently eligible for moneys from *(a)* the European regional development fund and *(b)* the European social fund.

Mr. Lang: The following areas have been designated under objective 2 (industrial regions) of the reformed structural funds and are therefore eligible for European regional development fund support:

the travel-to-work areas of Dumbarton, Greenock, Irvine, Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Lanarkshire, Cumnock and Sanquhar, Ayr, Girvan, Dundee, Arbroath, Falkirk, Alloa, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Bathgate; the wards of Argyll, Cornton, Gowanhill, Ballangeich, Kings Park, Torbrex, Borestone, Ladywell, Polmaise, Sauchenford, Whins and Logie in the travel-to-work area of Stirling.

In addition, the Government have submitted cases in favour of objective 5(b) (rural areas) designation for the Highlands and Islands, the intermediate areas of Dumfries and Galloway, the Borders, the eastern part of Dumfries and Galloway, and the rural parts of Grampian, Tayside and Central. The European Commission is expected soon to announce its decision on rural areas' eligibility.

Under the reform of the European social fund, which takes full effect in 1990, operations under objective 3 (combating long-term unemployment) and objective 4 (facilitating the occupational integration of young people) apply throughout the Community. Employment and vocational training measures located in objective 2 and 5(b) areas, which meet certain criteria, are also eligible for assistance. For 1989 applications are being dealt with under the previous fund guidelines.

Fishing Methods

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has completed his review of the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Fishing and Fishing Methods) (Scotland) Order 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have carried out detailed consultations with the fishing industry during the past year on possible changes to the fishing regime in Scottish inshore waters. Having considered all the arguments, we have today issued a consultation paper, which will receive wide circulation, setting out our proposals for change. A copy of the document has been placed in the Library. Comments on the proposals from interested parties have been requested by 2 June. Once these have been considered we expect to lay before the House a new order under the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act 1984.

Tourism

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether in the light of the review of the English tourist board and the British tourist authority, he has any plans to withdraw assistance from tourism projects in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: I have no such plans.

ENERGY

Petrol

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will *(a)* halt petrol imports and *(b)* put a price freeze on petrol sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No.

British Nuclear Fuels plc

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to reassess the level of accountability of British Nuclear Fuels plc to Parliament in light of the National Audit Office report "Department of Energy: Monitoring and Control of British Nuclear Fuels plc," dated 5 April.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government are awaiting the report of the Public Accounts Committee on this matter and will respond in due course.

Fawley Power Station

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the application by the Central Electricity Generating Board to build a coal-fired power station at Fawley B.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Central Electricity Generating Board formally withdrew the application on 30 March.

Radioactive Material

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if Her Majesty's Government will give permission to the European Commission to disclose details of safeguarded uranium at United Kingdom-based military-civil mixed facilities.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, if he will set out the current plans to repatriate the low and intermediate level radioactive waste to Japan from reprocessing contracts signed for THORP since 1976.

Mr. Michael Spicer: BNFL's post-1976 reprocessing contracts provide for the return of wastes after they have been put into a form suitable for safe transportation and storage.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the volumes of reprocessed plutonium and uranium likely to arise from British Nuclear Fuels plc's pre-1976 contracts; and what plans there are for *(a)* the length of time, *(b)* the conditions and *(c)* the security conditions under which this will be stored.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Approximately 2,900 tonnes of recovered uranium and 9 tonnes of recovered plutonium (fissile) have arisen, or are likely to arise, from overseas reprocessing contracts entered into before 1976 by British Nuclear Fuels plc. These materials are stored under secure conditions until required by the owners and are subject to appropriate IAEA and Euratom safeguards procedures.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many parliamentary answers he has given on plutonium in the periods *(a)* 1979 to 1984 and *(b)* 1985 to 1989, respectively.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Between May 1979 and December 1984, Ministers at the Department of Energy gave 75 answers to hon. Members in reply to questions relating to plutonium. From January 1985 onwards the total is 228.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information his Department has on the incidence of poisoning of domestic pets by substances containing alphachloralose.

Mr. Ryder: In the last five years the number of cases in which the death or illness of domestic pets has been attributed to alphachloralose are as follows:

	Incidents
1984	3
1985	6
1986	6
1987	6
1988	4

In all of these cases the domestic pet involved has been either a cat or a dog.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what controls exist on the stockpiling and sale of substances containing alphachloralose;

(2) what criteria have to be met by individuals wishing to obtain permission for the purchase of alphachloralose compounds for pest control.

Mr. Ryder: The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 require that any substance containing alphachloralose stored or sold as a pesticide must first be approved by Ministers and supplied to users in approved containers and under approved labels.

All those selling, supplying or storing a pesticide must take all reasonable precautions to protect human health, animals and plants and must be competent in the duties they perform. In addition, employers must ensure that employees have been adequately trained.

Additional requirements apply under the poisons law, restricting sale of alphachloralose with some exceptions to retail pharmacies or sellers listed by the local authority. A record must be kept of sales from retail pharmacies and for most exempted sales and the purchaser must be a person to whom it may properly be sold. Storage requirements to prevent unauthorised access and contamination of foodstuffs apply to retail shops and associated premises.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department has any information relating to human fatalities resulting from alphachloralose poisoning from agricultural and related uses.

Mr. Ryder: This question falls more to the Department of Employment than to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. However, the latest figures available to me show that there have been no human fatalities resulting from alphachloralose poisoning from agricultural or related use.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether alphachloralose has any agricultural uses.

Mr. Ryder: Some alphachloralose-containing products are approved for use as stupefying bait for the taking of feral pigeons and house sparrows for the purposes of preventing agricultural damage or preserving public health. This use is controlled by licensing under Section 16(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

Other alphachloralose-containing products are approved for use as rodenticides.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's guidance on the use of alphachloralose-based pesticides.

Mr. Ryder: In the case of alphachloralose being used as stupefying bait, my Department issues detailed guidelines which are contained in the form LP46 which is distributed to those taking part in operations. There are also

conditions of use set out on the actual licence. Further guidance is available from MAFF's wildlife and storage biology discipline at the relevant MAFF regional office.

In the case of alphachloralose being used as a rodenticide, statutory conditions of use are imposed on alphachloralose pesticide products approved under the Control of Pesticide Regulations 1986. The approved label and/or leaflet will include such information as field of use, maximum individual dose, operator and environmental protection measures and first aid advice.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions during each of the last three years he has initiated action following illegal use of alphachloralose-based pesticides.

Mr. Ryder: All cases of illegal use of alphachloralose-based pesticides are investigated under the Ministry's wildlife incident investigation scheme. In the last three years the number of cases involving alphachloralose investigated under this scheme are as follows:

	Incidents
1986	17
1987	22
1988	18

Irradiated Food

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce legislation to permit irradiated food to be sold in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health on 21 February at column *600*.

PRIME MINISTER

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what response she has made to President Gorbachev on the decision he announced in London on 7 April to end Soviet production of highly enriched uranium and weapons grade plutonium for military purposes.

The Prime Minister: None. The decisions announced by President Gorbachev do not affect the Soviet Union's weapons capability, because they hold stockpiles of highly enriched uranium and weapons-grade plutonium. Neither of these materials decays significantly. In addition, not all the reactors which can produce military plutonium are being shut down.

Policy Failures

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the policy failures of Her Majesty's Government since May 1979; and if she will give the reasons identified for the failure in each case.

The Prime Minister: This Government's policies have been successful.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SESSION 1988–89

17th April—28th April 1989

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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